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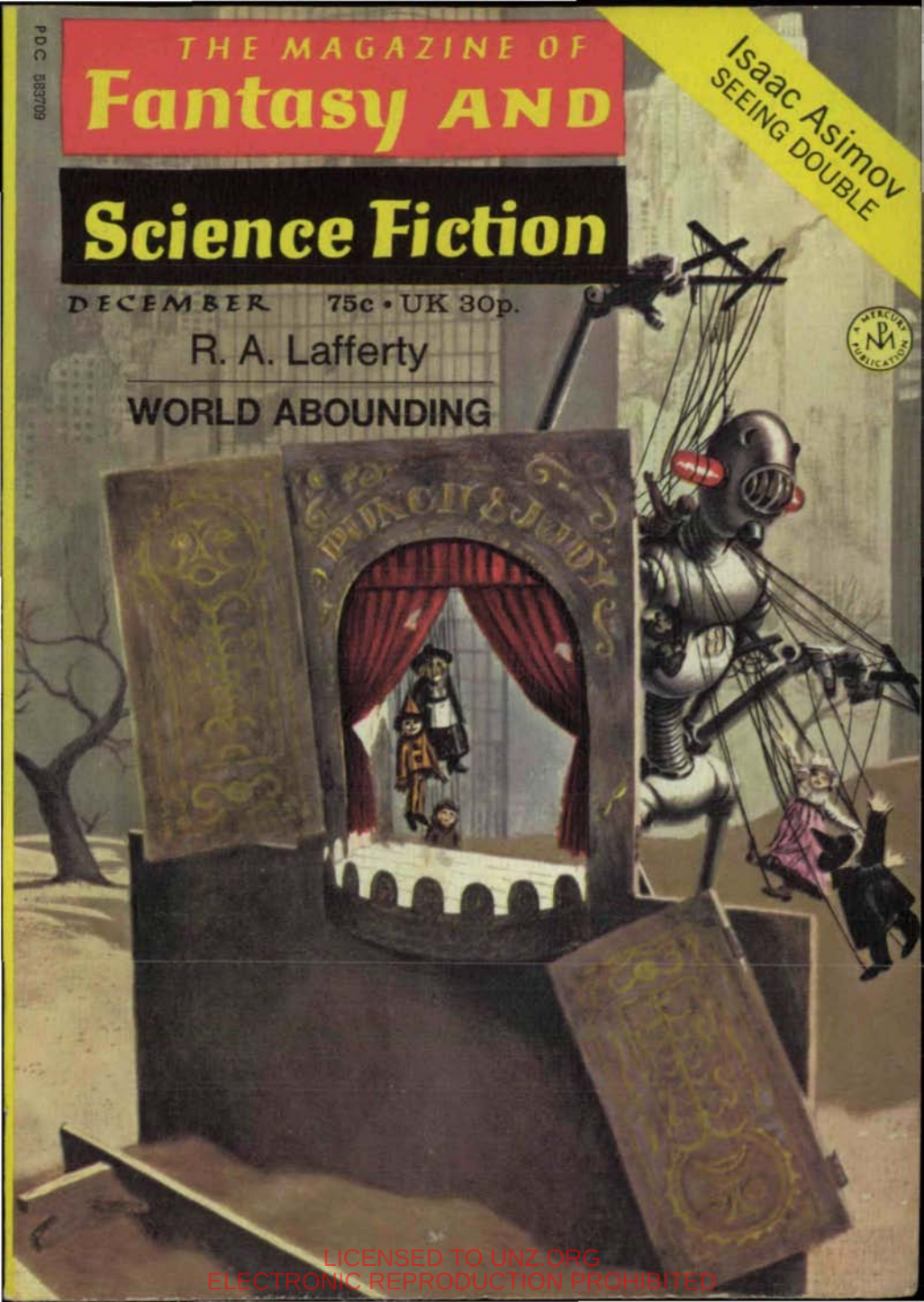
Isaac Asimov
SEEING DOUBLE

R. A. Lafferty
WORLD ABOUNDING



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Edward L. Ferman, EDITOR & PUBLISHER Isaac Asimov, SCIENCE EDITOR

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Joseph W. Ferman, CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD

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Keith Roberts last appeared here with two contemporary fantasies about Anita, a fun-loving witch (November and December 1970). His latest story is quite different – a grand, brawling adventure set against the exotic background of an ice-World – but it is no less entertaining.

The Wreck of the "Kissing Bitch"

by KEITH ROBERTS

OF ALL THE CITIES OF THE great ice plain that men once called the Matto Grosso, none was as ill-found and displeasing as Djobhabn. None, certainly, whose inhabitants were more lacking in the simple virtures of kindliness and mirth. Or so at least decided Frey Skalter of Abersgalt.

He was bouncing at the time, rapidly and painfully, down the steep ice path that led from the threshold of the Crescent Moon Inn to the sixth of the seven levels on which Djobhabn was built. After him, bounding and clattering, rolled his prize harpoons. Timbo, his bearer, pattered worriedly in their wake.

Skalter's unusual mode of exit had been dictated largely by the lack of a Djobhabian sense of fun. At the Crescent Moon, biggest and busiest of the city's taverns, the dancers, by tradition, perform unclothed. Tradition also dictates that those of the audience wishing their further acquaintanceship indicate their desire—and means—by a coin placed before them on the tabletop. These offerings the girls retrieve, sealing the prospective bargain with tact and delicacy. Skalter, rolling drunk from the bitter warmpond beer for which the place is also noted, had heated a golden noble to smoking point atop the nearest of the big old blubber stoves that lined the walls. The lure had been taken most satisfyingly; but the end result, he told himself, could scarcely have been foreseen.

He had time to tell himself little else. He fetched up against a boulder at the foot of the path with a thump that jarred the remaining breath from his body. He rolled over grunting, sat up feeling tenderly for damages. The rock had at least been conveniently placed. At his back, the ice chasm

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within which the city was built stretched down to a greenish gloom. The path was both steep and slippery, worn by the passing of many feet; had his course not been intercepted, his fall would have been eternal.

The shock had partly sobered him. He rose carefully, steadying himself against the ice wall to his left, as Timbo arrived with the harpoons. The lad chattered empty-mouthed, rolling his eyes at the abyss; and Skalter grinned. "Ice Mother guards her own," he said with his hands. "I carry the seed of a great house, Timbo; even goddesses must have a care for their dues."

He stared round him gloomily. "Now where," he mused aloud, "in this forsaken hole, can a man drink his beer and do no harm, without being mishandled by. . .ouch. . .thugs who wouldn't know a cow whale's butt from a foundered cargo hulk?"

Timbo pointed, crooning. Some hundred yars along the ledge, at the far end of the crevasse that housed the vertical township, a sign, faded and ill-lit, proclaimed the Tavern of the Black King. Skalter shrugged. He'd marked the place already, but had felt no inclination to enter. It wore a dismal, half-deserted look; and a master harpooner, fresh from a long, successful voyage on the Southern Ice, needs life and movement round him, and a modicum of gaiety. Already he was regretting the impulse that had made him leave the whaler *Bright Girl* at her first port of call. Had it not been for the whim, he would be halfway home to Abersgalt; tomorrow, he told himself, he would find out what ships were in the pound, and which were due to call. His body-belt was heavy; he would buy passage for Timbo and himself, travel home for once in style.

Ducking under the low entrance of the inn he collided with a short, portly figure swathed in furs that gave it the outline and dimensions of a barrel. He muttered an apology, and would have stalked on; but the other gave a shout of recognition. In an instant the two were capering in the narrow space, clapping each other on the back and roaring. Rolf Skane was a Friesgaltian, a fat, cheerful man with whom Skalter had shipped some five seasons back. He had been a first mate then, with a good record of killing runs behind him; now, as was evinced by the jewelery on his fingers, the thick gold torque slung round his neck, he had come up in the world. He had grown tired of whaling, he informed Skalter in a bull-like voice, bought himself the skipper's share of a bluff-bowed little tub of a merchantman. His trading had prospered; he owned two cargo boats now and was currently negotiating the purchase of a third. He aimed to leave Djobhabn at first light, but as yet the night was young. "My uncrowned king of lancers," he said, wheezing, "my prince of perforators, if ye'd stack those weapons ye carry for a while, and address y'self to a barrel of ale with me, y'd do me a service. It's a dank

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enough hole, the Mother knows; but the beer's as fine as ye'll taste, I warrant ye that. . ."

Skalter followed him down the narrow corridor of the place, shouldered behind him into the one low-ceilinged chamber. He stood for a moment, narrowing his eyes. The tavern was little more prepossessing within than without. At one end of the room the bar, stacked with its metal beer casks, was framed by the monstrous jawbones of a land whale; behind it a thickset, sour-faced man was setting out drinking cups, topping them with the dark, bitter beer. On the far wall, dimly visible through the wreaths of smoke, a crudely conceived mural represented the death of the whale that had given the inn its name. The great creature writhed, eyes snapping fire, sides hung thick with lances; in the background a schooner, headsails aback, was dwarfed by the monstrous shape. Men swarmed across the ice, cutlasses in their hands; others drove lances deeper into the thing's tattered sides; while above all a thick, dark fountain jetted at the sky. Men and ice alike were reddened by the horrid spray.

Skane, still roaring good-humoredly, possessed himself of a corner table. The dozen or so drinkers present had already turned away from examination of the newcomers, readdressed themselves listlessly to their beer. The ex-mate lit up a rank-smelling pipe, thrust his stumpy legs out comfortably and began the evening's business.

"I heard," said Skane, "ye were on the *Sunset Child* when she got stove in over Fyorsgep way. What happened there, old friend? Did ye miss y'r aim?"

"I missed nothing," said Skalter shortly. "To the silks I sank my shaft, and a brace more to make good our hold. But that creature, Thunderer, wasn't born to die of a lance." He grinned reflectively. "He still roams the Middle Ice," he said. "I saw him two seasons past, leading a herd out from the Abersgalt Break. Nine cows he had with him, as fat with oil as a man could wish; and more lancetips in his hide, I warrant, then treenails in our garboard strake."

"What vessel were ye on?"

"*Blonde Barb*, from Fyorsgep. Ako Sundermans, Master."

"And did ye offer chase?"

Skalter laughed. "Not so. Ako put up his helm, as if every Fire Giant in the Underworld was warming the ice 'twixt his runners. We didn't slacken till we raised Fyorsgep mole. . ."

"Barmaid," bellowed Skane. "Where in all the Hells, where in the Mother's realm, is our beer?"

Skalter, glancing up casually at the girl who brought the drinks, stopped speaking. He frowned, as a man mortally stricken by lance or spear may frown, as if glimpsing some truth hitherto inaccessible, before his eye glazes and he falls.

Skalter in those days was by no means what he appeared. Certainly the careless opulence of his dress, the insolent, swaggering walk, the reek of

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blubber and lymph that hung about him, were the marks of a whaleman; but his family, as he himself had hinted, were wealthy. There had always been Skalters in Abersgalt, merchants and warehousemen; but Frey, the eldest of three brothers, had as yet shown no inclination to follow the family trade. The wide ice beckoned, and the glinting, shifting horizons; at seventeen, followed by a spatter of his father's curses, he had shipped out on his first voyage. Ten years on the ice had toughened him; he had killed both whales and men and feared nothing that walked, ran or flew. Now it seemed he was in his turn transfixed, by a pair of black-fringed opal eyes.

Skane noticed the direction of his glance, and snorted with derision. "Mother save ye, Frey," he said. "Have ye taken leave of y'r senses?" He wrestled a passing serving wench into his friend's lap; she sat giggling plumply, favoring Skalter with gusts of none-too-sweet breath. He dislodged her abstractedly, eyes still following the brown, slim girl as she moved about her affairs. He said, "Who is she, Rolf?"

The other grunted. "Landlord's daughter, or so he reckons," he said. "Though how that slab-flanked old bull could sire such a stripling is more than I can say. T'is likely the other tale's true; they found her as a babe on the ice. An offering, to the Mother."

Frey started. "How was that?"

His companion shrugged. "Ask her y'rself, for I don't know the rights of it. Nor care overmuch, truth to tell. . ."

"It's true," mused Skalter, eyes grey and distant. His hands spoke rapidly to the dumb boy at his feet. Timbo nodded, eager as a dog, glancing from his master to the object of his concern. "A speywife warned me once," said Skalter slowly. "In Abersgalt it was, before I ever sailed. One day, I was to wed the Ice Eternal, I thought she meant—but it's no matter, Rolf. This is the Mother's babe."

Skane drained his pot in a single gurgling swallow. "Smitten ye are most certainly, and that to the quick," he said. "And there ye wallow, Frey Skalter, fountaining naught but drivel." He slammed the cup down irritably. "Away with the creature, man; thy strength would snap it in two. Say, will ye take passage with me or no?"

"I'll be at the pound," said Skalter vaguely. "I'll see you take your leave. . ."

Men bustled round the trader *Horn of Plenty* where she lay shackled to the ice. Dawn was in the sky, splitting the eastern gloom with flaring bands of yellow, throwing long shadows of spars and masts across the beaten grey surface of the pound. The wind riffled Skalter's hair as he stood staring up at the broad, patched hull. "Drink for me in the Ice Queen on Abersgalt mole," he called. "Remember me to old Ley Schaldron, if he still breathes. 'Ware trolls and were-maidens, Skane!"

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A blast of profanity answered him. "Skalter," said Skane pleadingly, "ye're a fine lance, the finest on the ice. Ship with me, on the old terms, and I'll promise ye—"

"A slow voyage, and a worse haven-making," said Skalter. "What, this lumbering tub to grip a whale? She'd burst her seams in the chasing, and so would you. You're old and fat, Rolf, and so's your ship; stick to the trades you know—"

"Then the Mother take thee!" Skane's apoplectic face appeared once more over the gunwale, glaring down in fury. It bobbed back; and Skalter heard the shouts to the bow men. Mauls rang, striking the stops from chains. Sails flew and leaped; Frey jumped clear as the stern tackles were released. The *Horn of Plenty* began to gather way, runners groaning and squealing. Such was her skipper's preoccupation that she all but rammed the sloping mole of iceblocks that guarded the harbor entrance. She hauled clear at the last moment, shaking out the rest of her sails with something of the ruffled dignity of a hen. Minutes later, only her mast trucks were visible; she faded fast into the deceptive whiteout of the horizon.

Skalter stared after her, hands on hips; then he turned and shrugged. "Grease the lancetips, Timbo," he said, "and see them safely stowed. We bide a time at the Black King, for it's my notion we follow the Mother's will. . ."

Skalter had picked the lad up in Abersgalt, on his last fleeting visit to his home. Timbo intrigued him; he had learned the hand-words by degrees, till he could converse nearly as nimbly as the boy himself. It was in this fashion they talked, one dim, howling evening two months after Skalter had first taken up his lodgings at the Black King. "Now of all mysteries," he mimed rapidly, "this is surely the greatest. For who till now heard of a wench who shrugged at the sight of gold?" He gestured irritably at the smoke-blackened walls of the little chamber. "I could buy this hovel ten times over, and that she knows full well, and her father too. And further—" he stuck his chest out indignantly, "—am I, Skalter of Abersgalt, to be passed over lightly, in silence? Answer me that. . ."

Timbo smiled, dark hair dropping across long, slant-tailed eyes.

"I know, I know," jeered Skalter. "Ye are of the Mother's faith. Her patience is endless as the ice. But mine is not; so expound me no more mysteries. . ." He scowled at the single buzzing striplight. "I bathed my skin away," he said. "I sweetened myself with creams and essences till I stank like a Fyorsgeppian streetwalker; that was thy doing, Timbo." He aimed an accusing finger at the boy. "Out there at the mole lies a thousand nobles' worth of ice yacht; such a craft as once I'd have scorned to travel in, let alone own. Did she take pleasure in it? By the Son Himself, she did not, but stared and smiled.

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Then she bade me swift journeying and a safe haven-making. The Mother's shrine groans with my gifts; night after night have I sat in this mournful hole, roistering and boasting with every underfed gallant Djobhabn owns; and for what? Frey Skalter, whom no woman ever refused, has been rendered eternally foolish; while the profits of half a voyaging are...*pffft*...gone with the Mother's winds. By every troll in the undercaverns, by the Waiting Wolf himself, what else has a man to do?"

Timbo touched his master's arm, and smiled again. The hand talk is good; it means life in a silent world. But there are some things the fingers are ill-equipped to say.

Matters came to a head the following evening.

As usual, the handful of locals who formed the tavern's staple trade had gathered in the long ill-lit room to talk and brood, drink their dark beer and rattle the dice in their carved bone cups. The object of Skalter's exasperation—Shurl was the name they had given her—moved as usual among the tables, emptying ashtrays, replenishing beer pots. Her hair, dark and braided, gleamed in the cold, dull light, rare and rich as yet; and she moved, to Skalter's eyes, as gracefully and lightly as the Mother herself. Frey sat moodily to one side of the room, a beer jug at his elbow, a rank-smelling cheroot clamped between his teeth. He was playing chess with his weapon bearer; the ancient game had survived, in spirit at least, the holocaust that had precipitated the Fourth Ice Age, though its pieces and their moves had changed nearly beyond recognition.

"Now, Timbo," said Skalter grimly, "my lancer menaces thy shiplord, while the unicorns guard diagonal and file. Answer that, with thy Mother-given wits..."

Timbo frowned, and countered. Skalter saw, too late, the trap into which he had fallen; but the game, already lost, was destined never to be completed. The door of the room burst open, with remarkable violence. Heads turned, and a silence fell, broken only by the eternal buzzing of the fluorescent rooftubes.

The man in the doorway was as tall or taller than Skalter. Furs—the stinking furs of a whaler—swathed his great frame from head to foot. A black beard, greasy and unkempt, covered most of his features; above it his single eye, small and deep-set, glowered a pale, icy blue. The other was hidden by a guard of carved whalebone; from beneath it a deep, disfiguring scar branched down across his cheek.

The intruder stood for a moment, staring; then he marched forward to the bar. The bone-topped table round which the dice players had grouped stood in his way; he gripped its edge with one massive fist, and heaved. Beer spilled; a chair toppled, rolling its surprised occupant across the floor. Daggers snicked instantly from their sheaths, but the newcomer turned, glaring, and the room fell quiet. Behind him had tramped a

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dozen men, as unwholesome as their leader and each armed to the teeth.

"Know me, Dojobhabnians," said the giant rumblingly. "Saskran Truehelm is my name, and well was it earned. I turn aside from no course I lay; in love, in war, in hatred, in the chase. Who among ye will be the first to give me nay?"

The silence intensified, and Truehelm, still glaring, swiveled slowly to face Skalter. The Abersgaltian sat easily, long legs crossed; but his body had tensed, and his face was set like stone. Half unconsciously he fingered the massive ring he wore; the raw gold mount, set with an uncut gem, that four seasons back, in a Keltshillian brothel brawl, had rid Truehelm of the sight of his good right eye. Always, since that day, Skalter had known a time of reckoning must come, but Truehelm's path had never since crossed his own.

That the other had recognized him was obvious enough, but for a moment longer the silence was preserved. Then Truehelm bellowed, throwing his head back, opening his mouth to show blackened teeth.

"Skalter of Abersgalt," he shouted. "By the Mother's will. . ." He advanced on the table. Skalter half crouched, as if ready to spring; and the giant's arm shot out, took his shoulder in a vice-like grip.

"Gently, my friend," muttered Truehelm. "Gently. . ." His one eye, baleful and cold as the eye of a fish, searched Skalter's face. "Man, but that was a crafty blow ye dealt me that night," he said. "A crafty blow. Had I been in my full wits, and not fuddled with bad ale, ye would never have worked y'r will. . ."

"I have the power to deal another," said Skalter between his teeth. "Do not tempt the Mother, Truehelm. I bear thee no ill-will; leave me in peace."

"Ill-will?" shouted the newcomer. "Ill-will? Who spoke of ill-will?" He spread his arms appealingly. "The ice is wide, the Mother's realm eternal; who am I to bear ill-will for a little blow? Lightly given, even more lightly received?" He hauled Skalter from the table by main force. "Ye'll drink with me," he shouted. "Aye, drink, to old times, and better times, the women we have laid, the others we have yet to breach. . .Is this one thine?" He pawed for Shurl across the counter top. The girl eeled back out of his reach. "A poor enough thing i' truth, an' my one good eye sees clearly," mumbled Truehelm. "But fitting, maybe, for an Abersgaltian. . ."

"Not mine," said Skalter between set lips. "Nor thine either, old mate." He punched the giant cheerfully, and leaned closer. "Rough ice needs a better sprung vessel. . ."

Truehelm roared again, enveloping Skalter, to his disgust, in a fetid and bear-like hug.

The long bar of the Black King resounded to snores. Skalter, dressed for the ice, eased the door ajar, peered round cautiously. The floor, still awash with beer, was heaped

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with recumbent forms; even Truehelm had at last succumbed, vast though his capacity undoubtedly was. Skalter's head was spinning vilely, but at least he had remained on his feet. He turned away, face set, edged the door closed softly behind him. A wiser man, he reflected, might have ended the business then and there with a well-placed dagger thrust, but that was not the way of an Abersgaltian, whose fastidiousness might yet end in his death.

Tubes flickered and hummed in the long ice-corridors of the inn. Skalter leaned for a moment against the wall, rolling his head, feeling the coldness against his temples; he rubbed his eyes to clear them, grimaced and walked steadily away. He paused at a door, tapped cautiously at first, then louder. A wait, and a voice answered uncertainly. He called softly, heard the ivory bars withdrawn. A face peeped into the corridor, a startled face with huge dark eyes, topped by a tangle of black hair. Skalter moved swiftly, Shurl was borne back, kicking, to the skin bed from which she had risen. She writhed, arcing her body and trying to bite; but Skalter's palm, clapped across her face, effectively prevented speech.

"Be quiet," he hissed. "Stupid girl. There is a great peril, and I mean you no harm."

He felt her relax by degrees, and cautiously removed his hand. "That's better," he said. "Now listen, and know me for a friend."

He spoke rapidly. Of all the villains roaming the wide ice, Truehelm was undoubtedly the worst. Pirate, murderer, few men of the Eight Cities had not heard his name. His black whaler, *Kissing Bitch*, had quartered the ice for years, robbing and pillaging where she could, but none had been found to call Truehelm to answer for his crimes. "In Fyorsgep," said Skalter, "at sight of his topsails, they blockade the mole. In Brershill, Friesgalt, my own Abersgalt, he dare not show his face. Where he has sailed, where havened, this past three seasons no man knows; but now he has come here, to Djobhabn and your house, which is an evil thing."

Shurl stared up in bewilderment. "But he spoke well of you," she said, "calling you a friend."

Skalter laughed shortly. "Insofar as his lying throat knows truth," he said, "it was truth he spoke when he named himself for what he is. There can be no swerving aside for Truehelm; he has vowed my life." He outlined his plan, briefly. "Skalter runs from no man," he said. "But Mother guard me, Shurl, I can see no harm come to thee. And harm will come, certainly; for drunken he might be, and a rogue, but no fool. One glance, to Saskran, speaks what others read in a book." He swallowed. "I shall break anchors with the dawn wind," he said. "You must rouse him for the chase; but gently, his temper is fiendish when he wakes. So I shall draw him from you to the wide ice, and there. . .the Mother will guard her own."

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The girl frowned. "But if he follows–"

"*Dancer* has the heels of any lumbering whaler," said Skalter lightly. "We'll play him, like a warmpond carp, and land him, maybe, on the gallows rig of Abersgalt. . ."

Shurl shivered, and gathered the furs closer round her throat. "But why?" she said. "Why should Skalter of Abersgalt make such a sport for me?"

"Because I love thee," said Skalter testily. "And had the Mother willed it would have given thee great lands, and honor as my wife." She opened her mouth, and he laid a finger on her lips, "No more; he may not sleep long. Remember what I told thee; an hour's start is all we need." He rose, flicked the heavy furs round him, smiled down briefly, and was gone.

She stared after him, frowning and biting her lips. Then she pushed the covers back. The air of the little chamber struck chill. In one corner, roughly hewn from the rock wall, was a shrine to the Mother. She knelt before it shivering, chin sunk on her breast. A long time she waited, silently; then she rose and began to dress.

At first light, twin shadows moved across the ice. No word was spoken between them. The lances, swung inboard by Timbo, clattered softly to *Dancer's* deck. Skalter ran forward, casting off the lashings that held the nylon sails to their booms. Blocks squealed; clouds of whiteness bellied from the delicate spars. The dawn was a dark rose flush, joining ice and sky, when the yacht slipped between the long moles. Skalter turned her bow due north, to where, three hundred miles or more beyond the ghostly horizon, lay Abersgalt and safety.

He stared behind him. Astern, fading fast now in the murk, was the spar forest of the Djobhabn pound and the squat, meanacing shadow of Truehelm's boat, moored hard by the mole. "He always was a drunkard and a slug," he said. "The Mother keep him in his natural mind. . ."

The runners crisped, singing sweetly over the ice, throwing back fine plumes of crystals that stung Skalter's face and eyes. The wind, freshening, thrummed in the rigging; and Timbo caught his master's eye and grinned. Frey laughed back, catching the boy's mood. It would be a long, hard chase, with death as the prize; but whatever the outcome, it would make a tale for the Abersgaltian songsmiths to tell for years to come.

The sun climbed to starboard, becoming a ball of white fire. Dazzling reflections lanced across the ice. Its surface was smooth here, worn by years of traffic; Skalter held his course steadily, concerned only for speed. He glanced astern at the empty, brilliant horizon, gestured to Timbo and laughed again; but the boy ignored him. He was staring forward, jaw sagging. Skalter followed the direction of his gaze and gasped in his turn. Sometimes, it is said, Ice Mother herself appears to

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the lonely and condemned. When she comes, it is as a young maiden, dark-eyed and sad. She stood facing them now, on the bow of the boat, her cloak flying in the wind; but it was with Shurl's voice she spoke.

"You never talked of love," she said falteringly. "Nor dare I think it, believing myself unworthy. But I knew you for my lord."

Skalter's bellow had in it something of the rage of a wounded bull calf. He ran forward, deserting the tiller; Timbo grabbed the shaft as *Dancer* yawed. "You little fool," shouted Frey. "Oh, you bloody little fool. . ." He grabbed her shoulders and shook, saw her eyes widen with fear.

The anger left him. It was no good, useless to explain how, in his heart, he had no hope. In light airs, *Dancer* might have stood a chance; but in this wind, *Kissing Bitch*, with her great area of sail, would overhaul her by nightfall. Shurl had consigned herself to almost certain death.

"Sit down," said Skalter gently. "Here, sit by me. Or the Mother's breath will freeze you."

The runners sang steadily over the ice.

At midday Timbo cried, wordless as a bird, and pointed astern.

Skalter was with him instantly, standing with one arm on the girl's shoulder, screwing his eyes against the keen bite of the wind. The sky had clouded, through the forenoon; the horizon was once more milky and vague. For a time he was unsure. Then he saw it; the pale-blue smudge, wavering and dancing with mirage. A vessel was following; she was still hull-down, but coming on fast.

He took the tiller, gesturing tersely to the boy to trim the sails.

The day wore on. For an hour, maybe two, the ice yacht seemed to hold her own, but inexorably the pursuer's vaster spread of sail began to tell. Timbo sweated at the ropes, trimming the yacht's tall wings again and again, drawing the utmost from every puff of wind. Astern, the silhouette grew clearer; there was no mistaking, now, the savage, brutal lines. The sun sank with painful slowness. *Dancer* fled on, beneath a sky of burning copper, and Skalter's hope partly revived. After nightfall, there would still be a chance. But the race had been lost before it was started. With sunset, the wind steadied again from the south. Frey noted, dully, the lessening of the gap between him and his enemy. The whaler was a towering shadow, grim against the pouring light; from her, carried on the wind, came the insistent booming of a gong.

The sun touched the ice, in a blood-red blaze. The *Bitch* was close enough now for heads to be distinguished above her gunwales. Skalter turned from her bitterly. The game was played through; soon Truehelm would be close enough to take his wind. He searched the horizon ahead, but it was empty. No witnesses, out here, to a private game of murder.

A voice echoed down the wind.

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"Skalter. . .heave to, ye'll never leave me. . ."

Skalter swore, signing to Timbo to take the tiller. Shurl, crouched in the bottom boards, raised a white, appalled face. She said through dry lips, "I'm sorry. . ." Skalter stared, then stooped, gripped her shoulder silently, and moved on. He lifted the harpoons from where they lay on the deck, hefted each in his palm. He shook the shafts to clear the long, gaudy streamers of the silks and glanced back to the whaler, measuring his cast. Nothing ethereal about *Kissing Bitch* now; she bulked against the brilliance, the sun glare striking between her broad, straddled runners. Her shadow, black and spiked, reached forward as if to engulf the smaller craft. Skalter saw the complication of her yards and rigging, the cavernous grinning of the land whale skulls at her stem. As he watched, he heard *Dancer's* sails begin to flog. The ice yacht was alee.

A lance snicked overhead, followed by another. Skalter frowned, flexed his shoulders, gauged his distance again and cast. Truehelm, posed spectacularly in the whaler's high bow, flung himself flat in the nick of time. The shaft took a man directly behind him, nailing him to the foremast. His shriek reached hollowly across the ice; on board the big vessel the ringing of the gongs intensified.

Truehelm jumped back, face dark with rage. "Now the Mother guard thee, Skalter," he bellowed. "I would have given thee any easy death. . ."

Another shout, and a dozen lances flickered from the whaler. One hissed by Skalter's head; another gouged long splinters from the yacht's side; a third heavy shaft struck her mast, stuck thrumming and quivering. Skalter poised his second weapon, but the cast was never made. Above him the weakened spar gave abruptly, shedding sail and boom. A hammer blow flung him to the deck while *Dancer,* encumbered by the trailing mass of nylon and cordage, spun on her heel, came into irons, and grated to a halt. Frey, struggling up, heard the long shriek of runners as *Kissing Bitch* glissaded past, turning majestically into the wind.

One other image came to him, of Timbo sitting coughing, red-muzzled, hands gripped across his chest. Between the fingers stood the long steel of a harpoon. So much Skalter saw, unconnectedly; then the night of the Mother claimed him.

To Frey, the return to awareness was like the slow climb from an abyss. His skull, it seemed, was split from ear to ear; pain raged through his head, augmented by the throbbing din that surrounded him, the fierce, erratic vibrations that shook his body. He opened his eyes cautiously, examined dim grey shapes that made no sense. His arms and legs were pinioned in some way; there was pain when he tried to move them, and more pain at his back.

Certainly he was dead and in Hell. He grappled with the notion, trying to force his bruised brain to work.

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The chase he remembered vaguely, and the man he had killed, and Shurl, like a creature from a warmer world.

His lips parted. He flung his aching head from side to side, grinning like an animal. He had remembered Timbo.

For a while he lay quiet. When next he opened his eyes his mind was clearer. He was lashed, he saw, to a grid of massive sloping timbers. Between them soughed a wind that knifed at his already partly numbed flesh. He turned his head painfully and realized where he was. Beneath him, a matter of feet away, was racing ice; above and behind him rose the great steering pivot of the *Kissing Bitch*. He was in the whaler's forepeak, lashed to the drain hatch on which a hunting vessel stores her fresh-killed meat.

He strained, arching his body, face reddening with effort. The fit left him weak and sick. He closed his eyes again and tried to think.

It was unlikely that Truchelm would let him die the sleep-like Death of the Ice, but torture by freezing would undoubtedly form the first stage of the end designed for him. He thought of Shurl, and Timbo, and let his anger build. Rage was necessary, for it meant life. He nurtured it, fanning the red flame to white-hot heat. The heat he forced out through his back and thighs, down to his feet and fingertips. The wind plucked and howled; he frowned, brows knitted, bringing more heat, more life, from the central, wilful part of him. It was a battle that went on through most of what was left of the night.

By dawn—signaled to Skalter, in his racing prison, by the flaring of yellow light from beneath—the pain in his head had ebbed a little. He lay stiffly on the grating, feeling through wrists and shoulders every tremor of the vessel. None knew the Middle Ice better than he; he pursed his lips, mentally unrolling a map. *Kissing Bitch*, it seemed, had kept up her wild pace; she would be half a day's sailing, at most, from his own home port of Abersgalt. Truchelm, of course, would not put in there; to show his face in the greatest of the ice-townships would be to court instant death. To the west of the city for many miles stretched the impassable Abersgalt crevasse; the whaler would undoubtedly swing to the east, skirting Brershill and Fyorsgep, press on to the wild Northern Ice. Somewhere in its locked fastnesses she must have her haven, though he, Skalter, would never see the end of the voyage.

He put the thought from him, concentrated his whole attention on the vessel. Faintly, over the roar and hiss of the great runners beneath the hull, he could make out the clash and rattle of blocks, slatting of sails, creak and groan of timbers, the thousand noises of an ice ship under sail. Helm orders too reached him, piercing the din. He listened, absorbed. Truchelm had turned to starboard; that, for a venture, was to avoid the broken ice at the foot of the Hill of Heroes, the long crest that

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guards Abersgalt to the south. He was closer to the city than he had realized. He groaned, wrenching at the nylon cords that held him, but it was useless. The loops gave and stretched, but no strength he could summon would break them.

He made himself be still. Soon, in an hour or less, the ice ship would enter the long, sweeping Valley of Ivory, at this season of the year little traveled. Truehelm, though insolent enough, was choosing his course well. By early evening he would be abreast of Fyorsgep; by nightfall, well out on the Northern Ice.

In time, the expected course correction came. The whaler thundered across a broken scree, checked, lurched once more onto her true heading. Skalter heard the patter of feet on the deck overhead. In these dangerous narrows, Truehelm was crowding on yet more sail.

Sometime in the long afternoon Skalter dozed again. When he woke he was shivering uncontrollably. Not even rage could hold the cold any longer; he had reached the end of his resistance. He thought of Shurl and might have wept, but his eyes, puffy and red-rimmed, denied him even the harsh comfort of tears.

The glow of sunset was infusing the little space in which he lay when he became once more alert. *Kissing Bitch* had changed course abruptly, with a crashing squeal. He frowned, wondering. Another course correction, and another; the ship was jigging and darting, as if pursued. She struck an ice reef, with a shock that wrenched Skalter's numbed shoulders and back. Helm orders sounded again; then he heard, dimly through the uproar, the panic-stricken bellowing of a land whale.

He began cursing, steadily. Since time immemorial, the flat lands beyond Fyorsgep had been kept by the men of all Eight Cities as a preserve. Here the great herds came in their season to breed and gambol, indifferent to the vessels that plied forward and back to Fyorsgep and Abersgalt. Skalter had crossed the Breeding Plains many a time, on his way to or from the Northern Ice, marveling at the placidity of the huge creatures that thronged them. Were it not for the preserves, the herds might long ago have been thinned to the point of extinction; it was sacrilege and worse to cast a harpoon within forty miles of Fyorsgep Pound. Nonetheless, Truehelm was hunting.

Kissing Bitch killed at nightfall. Skalter, still raging, heard the hoarse bellowings of the stricken beast, the tearing shriek as the ice anchors were released, drawing the struggling creature to a halt. Orders were shouted, feet raced overhead; later came the creak and groan of tackles. The first of the catch—blubber for oil fuel, vast dripping steaks of meat—was being hoisted inboard. Skalter writhed futilely. Truehelm would waste no time here and certainly wouldn't risk firing his trypots. He'd strip and stow the blubber, the most useful part of the catch, take what flesh he needed, leave the rest for the birds and

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wandering wolves. It was a vicious, criminal waste.

Kissing Bitch trembled slightly as the first of the blubber chunks were levered down into her hold. Skalter lay eyes closed, conserving what remained of his strength. Closer sounds of activity roused him. There was a groan and creak as the forepeak hatch covers were lifted. Torchlight gleamed, orange and flickering; by its aid he saw the first slabs of meat lowered to the grating beside him. Truhelm, for all his malpractice, ran a tight ship. Deckhands swarmed down the falls of the tackles; in a commendably short time the cargo, for what it was—they had taken, to Skalter's eye, barely a quarter of the carcass—was stowed, and the hatches were being replaced.

Last of all came Truchelm. He ducked through the bulkhead companion, lamp in hand, a long flensing knife stuck through his belt. He stood awhile brooding down from his great height, watching Skalter as he lay motionless. "Well, my friend," he said finally, "my boast was made good. Truehelm never swerves from any course; in hunting, in love, in hate." He squatted beside Frey, fumbled with the eyeguard, raised it briefly to show the mass of deformed gristle behind. "This ye gave me," he said. "But my vengeance ran straight and true. Ye'll lose y'r own eyes, soon, but they'll be the last to go. Ye'll lose a lot else first."

Skalter raised himself slightly, and spat.

The other's face didn't alter. He drew the knife from his belt, thoughtfully, pushed its point against Skalter's upper arm. Blood ran instantly, coursing to the beams of the grating. "Ye'll beg for death," said Truehelm, "while yet y'r tongue remains. Have ye ever seen a man skinned?" The knife moved down, biting like fire. "Think on it, Frey Skalter," said Truehelm. "Think, and pray..." He slammed the knife viciously into the beam, inches from Skalter's side. It stuck quivering, lamplight moving on the blade. He rose, stared a moment longer, then stooped back through the bulkhead. Skalter heard the clunk as the hatch was dogged shut behind him.

He lay quiet, hearing the sounds of the vessel getting under way. Light, a ghostly nimbus, struck up through the bars of the grating. In the outer world, he guessed, the moon had risen. The glow caught the keen blade of the knife, vibrating now to the movement of the ship.

It was slow, painful work. Skalter's head swam giddily; between each effort he was forced to rest. The cords gave, sullenly. They would never snap; but they had loosened, they were moving. His knees were bent; his shoulders rested now a foot further down the bars. The pain in his ankles was intense.

His left wrist touched steel. He drew his breath sharply, trying to raise his head. It was still a desperate business. One jolt, one ill-timed lurch, and the knife would tinkle to the ice, taking his last chance with it.

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He bit his tongue, and felt a loop of the lashing part.

Unexpectedly, his hand was free. He grabbed for the knife, sliced the remaining cords. Moments later he was standing, leaning against the bulkhead while sparks swam and flashed behind his lids.

He wiped his forehead, hand shaking, pushed the tangled hair back from his eyes. He had won his freedom, and he was armed. He could at least sell his life dearly now, when they came for him.

He knelt, frowned down through the drain hatch at the flashing ice. The grating, he saw, was not a solid thing. Its individual beams, eight feet or more long and correspondingly thick, rested in rabbets cut in the coaming. He could lift them clear readily enough, swing beneath the hull and drop. He listened to the thunder of the runners, and shuddered. That had been his first notion, but it was out of the question. *Kissing Bitch,* sated, was moving fast again for her haven; if the bilge skids missed him, he would be caught by the great stern runners, smashed to an anonymous pulp on the ice. And in any event, there was Shurl. He couldn't desert her; if he escaped, he had only too clear a notion of what form Truehelm's displeasure would take.

The steering gear moved and squealed. They were nearing the Wild Ice now, a ridged, broken terrain into which few vessels would have ventured with the light of day to guide them. Frey shook his head. Truehelm was holding his course; either he or his steersman was arrogantly confident of his skill.

Skalter pressed his hands against the great smooth column of the steering pivot, and swore. The knife had seemed to offer hope where there was none, but it had been fleeting and false. He was still a prisoner; there was nothing he could do to check Truehelm's course.

He drew a long breath, staring. Then he moved rapidly round the forepeak, a new light in his eyes. To either side of the little hold, massive kneepieces stiffened the junctures of deck beams with the ribs supporting the vessel's fiberglass hull. Skalter frowned, touching and groping in the gloom, measuring distances with his eyes. Then he dropped to his knees again, peering. The steering spindle, thicker than his body, connected with the runners themselves by way of a framework like a massive sledge. From the tips of the runners, secondary braces rose to a massive collar, clamped to the spindle at the level of the grating. Skalter glanced up. From the collar forward to the ends of the first deck beam was, as near as he could judge, eight feet.

He set to work feverishly, grabbing the stacked chunks of flesh, flinging them aside. He was bloody and panting by the time he had the first of the hatch timbers free. He raised it, seized the collops of meat, tumbled them through to the ice. As he worked, he prayed that Truehelm kept no good watch astern. His luck held; no alarm was raised.

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The second beam was clear. He lifted it, grunting. It was heavy and slippery, stained black with old blood. He laid it beside the first. Another followed, and another. The forepeak was empty by the time he was through, the flesh of the luckless whale strewn along a ten-mile trail south to Fyorsgep. A trail, he thought grimly, that at the least would be easy enough to follow.

He rested for a moment, breathing heavily. Truehelm had doubled his bow lookouts; he heard the calls come clear and high above his head. *Kissing Bitch* responded, with lurches and crashing. Another call; the helm was brought amidships, then instantly to port. They were into the broken ground already; there was no time to lose.

On the nearest bulkhead hung a coil of nylon line; he grabbed it, lopping the precious stuff indifferently into lengths with which he lashed four of the beams into a single massive joist. He heaved it aside, began on the second. When he had finished, the thing was nearly too heavy to lift. He manhandled it forward, heaved the end onto his shoulder, forced the butt against the first of the knees overhead. It rested neatly in the angle between hull and deck. He raised the inboard end, waiting his chance. The pivot turned, steadied; he dropped the joist cleanly into the joint between the collar and the bracings of the skids.

He ran back for the other beam. A call from the lookout brought his heart into his mouth, but the course correction was minimal, and to port. The helm centered; he waited, sweating, the timber gripped against his chest. Twice the end of the joist missed engaging by an inch; then the thing slid home. With its fellow it now formed a triangle, the base of which was the deck beam overhead.

Skalter staggered, gripping the bulkhead for support; then he raised an exultant face. "Now, Saskran Truehelm, at last thou art aptly named," he shouted above the wind. "For surely thou steerest the straightest course ever given to man..." He flung himself away, lay coiled on the forward decking to await the inevitable.

His vigil was of short duration. He heard the lookouts cry, then cry again, with the shrillness of terror. The pivot moved to starboard, groaned and locked. An uproar of shouting then, the panic-striken surge of feet across the deck. Up there, Skalter knew, they would be flinging all their strength onto the unresponding wheel. The beams creaked, but their leverage was too great. The ice anchors shrieked; then the whaler's runners struck rough ground, bounded, crashed again. Splinters flew as the steering gear disintegrated under the shock. For a heart-stopping moment the whole vessel seemed to hang, clear of contact with the ice; then she struck, with a roar like the end of the world.

Skalter struggled up, half-stunned. Round him the blackness was shot with flickering light. The decking was split above his head. Somewhere

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there was shouting; a man was screaming, another sobbing as if in mortal pain. The wind soughed, over the shattered hull; mingled with it came the rising crackle of flames.

He groped for the broken deck edge, hauled himself up and stared round.

For a moment his brain refused to accept the evidence of his eyes. He was looking, it seemed, up and across a tangled hill of cordage, spars, wildly flogging sails. The hill was the main deck of *Kissing Bitch*. He screwed his eyes shut, opened them again, and made out above him, dim in the night, the far edge of the crevasse into which she had plunged. Her stern still rested on the lip of ice. Her bowsprit, he saw, had plunged deeply into the crusted snow of the nearer wall; the broken stump still held her firmly, hull bridging the enormous rift. Fires had broken out in a dozen places; oil from spilled lamps dribbled across her deck in runnels of pale flame.

The icy wind had revived him a little. He started crawling grimly up the impossible slope. Here and there figures writhed and moaned, trapped by the tangle of spars. He ignored them, intent on his search.

He found her, by a miracle, huddled where she had been flung against the stump of the mizzen. No time for talk; he took her scruff, bundled her to the vessel's side. He peered over. Below, vaguely visible against the black-green gloom of the crevasse, ran a narrow ribbon of snow. He pointed, shouting. She seemed to understand what was required of her; she swung her legs across the rail, clumsily, and dropped as limp and unprotesting as a doll. He saw her hit the ice ledge and sprawl.

A voice hailed him, feebly. He turned, pushing himself upright. Truehelm lay on the stained deck, still pinned by the boom that had smashed his hips. His eye rolled, terrified, at Skalter and the encroaching flames.

Just what passed through the Abersgaltian's mind is difficult to say. Certainly no death is more terrible than death by fire; it means torment to the flesh and the tortures of the Underworld to follow. Skalter stood a moment, frowning, then nodded briefly, and inched his way across the deck. Harpoons lay where they had rolled, tumbled from a bulwark rack. He gathered up three, weighted the heaviest, turned back. Truehelm raised a bloodstained hand, and Skalter smiled.

"Ice Mother take thee, Saskran," he said gently, and cast.

He thumped to the ice beside Shurl, pulled her to her feet. He moved off along the ledge, probing cautiously with the harpoons. Behind him, the heat and glow increased. The fire had reached the stricken vessel's holds. Orange banners of flame rose into the sky, a beacon visible for miles. The night was filled with the stench of burning blubber. Those of her crew still capable of movement were swarming from *Kissing Bitch* now. For a time it seemed that they hadn't seen the

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ledge; then a shout was raised. Skalter, staring back, set his mouth. A dozen figures were stumbling after him along the narrow path; he saw in their hands the glint of steel.

He pushed the girl behind him, into a crevice of the ice wall, and hefted his remaining weapons. The first of the pursuers closed with him. Skalter presented a harpoon tip to his chest. He gripped it, thrust it aside, and Frey struck with the second shaft. The creature screamed, took the weapon with him over the lip of the crevasse. The others faltered, came on again. Skalter stabbed a man in the throat, clubbed another, hurled the harpoon at the remainder and fled, still dragging the girl by the wrist. Fifty yards on, the ribbon of snow petered to nothing. The pursuers yelled with triumph.

Skalter glared back. The nearest of the attackers was almost on him. He gripped Shurl tightly round the waist, urged her over the edge of the path. The two bodies, locked together, plunged into the dark.

In the morning the trader *Horn of Plenty*, commandeered by the indignant folk of Fyorsgep and following a plainly blazed track, came upon an extraordinary sight. Struck clear across the huge Bravena crevasse, five hundred feet of sullenly gleaming dark-green ice, lay the scorched bones of a great ship. Round her clustered a score of burned and frozen wretches who were glad, perhaps, of the death that came quickly to them. A dozen more survivors, huddled helplessly below the crevasse lip on a narrow ledge of ice, were similarly dispatched; and the party was preparing to leave the scene of death when one of their number, exploring the cleft in search of further victims, was startled by a hail from the depths. The voice boomed eerily, magnified by the sheer ice walls, so that the man fled in haste, convinced some Fire Giant was burrowing to the light, indignant at the invasion of his domain. It was Rolf Skane who finally crawled to the edge, peered over. What he saw sent him yelling for ladders and ropes, and in time Skalter, who had spent some hours digging his way to the surface of the vast snowdrift into which he had plunged, was drawn to the Mother's open air. With him came Shurl, intimately bruised and still a little dazed, but far from cold.

So at least the legend was sung by the minstrels of Abersgalt; and while there are some in the Eight Cities who hold that an Abersgaltian speaking the truth and the melting of the Ice Eternal are events of equal probability, it's best to conceal such doubts. For the nobility of Abersgalt are proud, and the House of Skalter the proudest of them all.

Frey, so the story goes, lived many years happily with his brown-skinned bride; till the Great Sickness that romped through both Abersgalt and Brershill robbed him of the child, set him once more to that life of wandering of which a tale has already been told.

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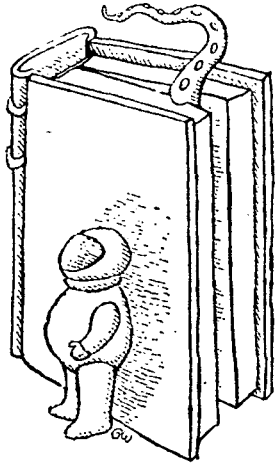
JAMES BLISH

BOOKS

STURGEON IS ALIVE AND WELL..., Theodore Sturgeon, Putnam, $4.95
STRANGE SEAS AND SHORES, Avram Davidson, Doubleday, $4.95
THE ALIEN, L. P. Davies, Doubleday, $4.95
OPERATION CHAOS, Poul Anderson, Doubleday, $4.95
ALONE AGAINST TOMORROW, Harlan Ellison, Macmillan, $6.95
I PAINT WHAT I SEE, Gahan Wilson, Simon & Schuster, $5.95



THERE SEEMS TO BE A CERTAIN incredulity in the title and in the author's preface of STURGEON IS ALIVE AND WELL..., so perhaps it's not surprising that one of the most powerful stories in it is that of a man trying to fight his way out of a bungled suicide attempt. Appropriately, it is the last story.

There are twelve stories all told, of which three may be familiar to you: the 1954 *"To Here and the Easel"* (Ballantine), *"Slow Sculpture,"* which as I write is a Hugo nominee, and *"Brownshoes,"* which as *"The Man Who Learned Loving"* was a Nebula runner-up and appeared in this magazine (the indicia mysteriously hands the copyright to another publisher). The others all appeared in men's magazines, and sometimes show it—by the time I finished the book I was a little tired of the heroine who lies down for the here a few hours after they've met.

Of the nine probably unfamiliar tales, five, including *"Suicide,"* are straight mainstream stories and very good ones; it's well past high time that editors allowed Sturgeon to show his potentials in this field. Another, *"Crate,"* is a shipwreck-and-survival story to which the science-fiction trappings are nearly superfluous (and it's also very good). *"Uncle Fremmis,"* about a man who can thump people's worn-out thinking patterns back into alignment as he would thump a misbehaving old radio, is on the borderline between

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fantasy and science fiction, as is the marvelous prime mover of *"Brown-shoes;"* only *"The Patterns of Dorne"* is pure-quill science fiction, as seen through the unique Sturgeon eye. And for those of you whose memories or libraries don't go back to 1954, I should add that *"To Here and the Easel,"* which is about a stuck painter whose blockage takes the form of identification with a character in Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso,* is a fine, free-wheeling tour de force of what can be either pure fantasy or abnormal psychology, as you will.

There is not a dud in the lot. My favorite, by a whisker, is *"It Was Nothing–Really!"* which carries a standard technique of sf, extrapolation, all the way up the curve into Cloud-Cuckoo-Land; but possibly my preference for it may be because it is outright comic, whereas all the other stories are either intense or grim. (Collections should never be read through at one sitting!) It is also uncharacteristic in another way: of all the stories, it is the one which least exploits the Sturgeon Eye, which sees better than any other writer's eye in our field that people become truly themselves (or fail to) primarily through their relationships with other people; the recluse, the conformist, or the man self-trapped in an obsession or an ideal image of himself is living a pseudo-life which is, whether he knows it or not, a private hell.

Almost all the stories in this volume dramatize one facet or another of this observation, which greatly broadens Sturgeon's earlier preoccupation with the various forms of love; he has grown a great deal during his six years of silence. Of them all, the one which makes the point most openly is *"The Girl Who Knew What They Meant,"* but it is almost omnipresent.

I see that I have made the book look blatantly moralistic, and it is; but I seriously doubt that that will bother any grown-up reader. The stories are almost all good as tales told for their own sakes, they are without exception technically adroit, and the fact that they are also About Something is the rarest and most treasurable of fictional qualities. Welcome home, Ted.

Avram Davidson's STRANGE SEAS AND SHORES, a collection by a younger master, contains 17 stories, all of them fantasies and all so wildly, antically different from anybody else's work, and from each other, that they reduced the jacket designer to despair (and to a picture of an ocean with an ice-bag floating on it). One of them, *"A Bottle Full of Kismet,"* is new; 10 appeared in this magazine, five in one of the *Galaxy* magazines, and one in a men's magazine.

Most of the stories are fantasies, including *"The Sources of the Nile,"* already a classic in its field, and *"The Goobers,"* the story that appeared in the men's magazine, a story of childhood terror with an utterly unpredictable ending. Of the seven science fiction stories, *"The House*

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the Blakeneys Built" is by far the strongest. Among them is *"Dr. Morris Goldpepper Returns,"* but it isn't half as funny as the story to which it is a sequel, *"Help! I am Dr. Morris Goldpepper,"* which furthermore is *not* in this collection. However, amends are made with *"Take Wooden Indians,"* which has my vote for being the oddest time-travel story I ever read, and one of the most satisfying, too. *"Apres Nous"* is also a time-travel story that has considerable bite despite being only two pages long and relatively conventional to boot.

There is an introduction by Ray Bradbury which compares Davidson to a list of better-known writers, and I think Bradbury has put Davidson in just the right company. There's also a preface by the author which is as funny as anything in the book (some of the stories, in fact, are downright grim). Highly recommended.

L.P. Davies' THE ALIEN, a well-written novel first published in England in 1968, is difficult to classify. It is science fiction, since it does have an alien in it, who is identified by blood test on the first page; he has gotten himself into a mangling accident and wound up in a hospital, where he is instantly unmasked by the resident hematologist.

But from here on out, nothing is what it seems. The alien had been calling himself John Maxwell, but when we meet Maxwell in the second chapter he has no memory of anything that happened to him before the accident, and only gradually becomes aware that the British government's Intelligence arm is using him as a stake-out in order to trap possible others of his kind. But what *is* his kind? He doesn't know, though he is almost immediately contacted by some non-government people who seem to know a lot about him.

Davies' experience as the author of nine mystery novels shows here to great advantage; the complexities and contradictions pile up steadily to the point where it seems impossible that there should be any rational solution for them. But there is, and when you look back to the first chapter you realize that Davies has played absolutely fair—all the planets are there, in the classic detective story manner.

This is a thriller pure and simple and leaves you with nothing to think about when you're through with it, but it's worth reading for its sheer adroitness, suspense, and puzzlement.

Readers of this magazine who have been with us since 1956 will find in Poul Anderson's OPERATION CHAOS four novelets they have read, but which appeared so widely spaced out from each other that their connections may have often gone unnoticed. Anderson has now woven them together with a fifth strand, and so skillfully (as usual) that the seams hardly show.

As Heinlein (to whom the book is

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dedicated) did before him, he posits an alternate Earth where magic works and is a part of everyday life, as well as of politics, warfare, medicine, the law, and, of course, religion. The hero and heroine have become the objects of special attention by the Adversary, though they seem only perfectly ordinary members of their society—he a werewolf, she a witch. The reason for the special attention, which takes the forms, successively, of an afreet, a salamander, an incubus and a changeling, isn't revealed until very late in the book, but when it does show up, it is certainly no trifle.

Poul's magic—his formal magic, that is—is borrowed eclectically from a good many different sources, and he has done a thorough job of making it seem an adjunct to, rather than a denial of, natural law. I can attest, too, that that part of it which falls within the Christian tradition is authentic, with one sizable exception: he has made his witch-heroine merely a female version of a sorcerer. The two were in fact utterly different: the true magician had to be a man of the utmost piety in order to be granted the power to control demons, whereas the witch—male or female—drew power from the opposite source, a pact with the devil. Anderson's Virginia is neither one nor the other; she has made no pacts, yet neither she nor her husband are more pious than run-of-the-mill semi-agnostics (Anderson at one point compares them specifically with Unitarians). This question is simply never mentioned in the novel; one is left to assume, instead, that witchcraft is just a form of arcane technology. Well, it is a different Earth, and so different rules govern, but so much respect is paid to all other aspects of magic that I am sorry for the scamping of this one.

The speed of the action renders such pedantry almost beside the point, however. In addition, the book is well populated and contains a great deal of humor; and—difficult though it is to imagine under these essentially playful circumstances—quite a lot of genuine emotion. It's rather a relief, for example, to encounter a portrayal of a real, working marriage, stresses and strains not slighted, but working nonetheless.

The novel is not, in my judgment, one of the great fantasies (like THE WORM OUROBOUROS or JURGEN), but it occupies an honorable place beside the Pratt/deCamp fantasies, MAGIC, INCORPORATED or Anderson's own THREE HEARTS AND THREE LIONS. That's good company too.

Ordinarily a review should waste no time with lists, but I have been told—and I have no way to check it here—that every story in ALONE AGAINST TOMORROW has appeared in one or another previous Ellison collection; so here is the TOC to check against whatever Ellisons you already own. "I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream;" "The Discarded;" "Deeper than the Dark-

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ness;" "Blind Lightning;" "All the Sounds of Fear;" "The Silver Corridor;" " 'Repent, Harlequin!' Said the Ticktockman;" "Bright Eyes;" "Are You Listening?;" "Try a Dull Knife;" "In Lonely Lands;" "Eyes of Dust;" "Nothing for My Noon Meal;" "O Ye of Little Faith;" "The Time of the Eye;" "Life Hutch;" "The Very Last Day of a Good Woman;" "Night Vigil;" "Lonelyache," and "Pennies, Off a Dead Man's Eyes."

Luckily for me, I had read only four of the twenty before, and I read them again anyhow. One, the 1957 "Deeper Than the Darkness," I encountered in its first magazine publication, and I still maintain that a theremin has no keyboard and is an unsuitable instrument for a minstrel, because it can't form chords; but it's a good story anyhow.

The theme of the re-selection, if that is what this book is, is alienation: "Alone against his world, the man of today finds his gods have deserted him, his brother has grown fangs, the machine clatters ever nearer on his heels, fear is the only lover demanding his clasp, and without answers he turns and turns, and finds only darkness." And more than that; in some of the stories here, the character has become alienated from himself.

Yet oddly, the overall effect of the collection is not depressing, I think because of the intensity with which most of the stories are informed. A given Ellison story may be shapeless, overwritten, or stuffed with irrelevancies and approximate words, but the one quality almost never missing is passion.

This makes the book quite impossible to read at one sitting (which, as I've mentioned above, is a bad idea for collections anyhow), for Ellison seems incapable of writing any other way but at the top of his voice, which can be wearing in large doses. If you sensibly treat it as a sampler, however, it's a good buy; and if you have no other Ellison collection, this one—because it contains samples of his work from every phase of his career so far—offers a good look at his range, as well as his limitations.

I PAINT WHAT I SEE is by far the largest (about 9" x 11") and handsomest collection of Gahan Wilson's cartoons to date. The jacket blurb modestly claims that there are over 100 cartoons; there are actually closer to 200 fiendishly funny selections from *F&SF*, *Playboy* and other magazines. Included is the classic Santa Claus cartoon (workmen and little old lady regarding her fireplace, in which lies a skeleton in a Santa Claus outfit: "Well, we found out what's been clogging your chimney since last December, Miss Emmy."). A fine gift item or addition to your own library.

– E.L.F.

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"I can never sell ticket one in this Goddam town."

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It has been said that the most tired plots come to life in the right hands, and this must be true. For it never fails: just when we get a feeling that it is time to declare a moratorium on certain sf themes (in this case, freezing after death) someone comes along with a perfectly lovely and fresh treatment that we are delighted to pass on.

Grand Design

by GEORGE C. CHESBRO

THE BIRTH OF THE SOLAR system is lost on John Wallach, whose interests never extended to astronomy or cosmology. Sensing this, they speed through the next few billion years, slowing for the genesis of life in Earth's seas, then again accelerating through the evolution of fishes to the key sequence when, for the first time, living creatures drag themselves onto the land. Fishes become amphibians become reptiles. Special emphasis is placed upon the relationship between evolution and radical environmental change. John Wallach likes the dinosaur sequence; he is amused by the small, furry creatures which scurry between the great lizards' massive legs, or die in their jaws. Then the ice comes, and the giants are blown away with the wind, leaving only the tiny, running things behind. The ice recedes, then comes again, and there is Man, moving inexorably from his caves of stone to his canyons of steel where a cement truck skids on a patch of ice, crushing John Wallach beneath its wheels.

Wallach screamed, pushing against the restraining straps. But this time the terrible, cold rubber and pitted concrete were replaced by warm, soothing hands; the sound of squealing brakes and crunching bone became a woman's voice.

"Mr. Wallach? Mr. Wallach, it's all right now. You can open your eyes."

He did, and almost swallowed his tongue. Later, when he would take the time to look into it, John Wallach would decide that the woman's face, too, was. . .beautiful, a confection of green eyes, full, sensual lips and high smooth cheekbones, all of it framed by a glittering fountain of shoulder length, ebony black hair. However, for the moment it was her breasts

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that commanded his full attention. The mounds of flesh were full and firm, topped by light-brown aureolas, and candy-pink nipples that stiffened under his gaze.

His eyes swept down the rest of her body; her navel was a puckered, corded island in the middle of a sea of translucent skin; and below it the Promised Land, a silky triangle of pubic hair forming the perfect counterpoint to her milky thighs.

"Mr. Wallach. . .?"

"Grmmf."

"Now, now, Mr. Wallach," the woman said, playfully shaking her finger in front of his nose, "you can't fool me. I know you can understand me. You think in English, and I'm a very good English-speaker. So there!" The movement of the woman's finger had triggered a chain reaction in the rest of her body. Wallach began to sweat, and the woman's smile slowly faded. "Oh dear, I do hope nothing is wrong."

"Grmmf."

"Well, anyway," the woman continued enthusiastically, "my name is Reema, and I've been assigned as your tutor. I know it must be terribly difficult for you to sort everything out in such a short time, but we didn't want you to be alone when you woke up. Just to bring you up to date, you died in 1970. Fortunately, you had made arrangements to have your body frozen. Do you remember?"

"So the Cryogenics boys were right," he said softly. "I died, and you brought me back to life."

"Well, I can't take the credit personally," Reema said, unbuckling the restraining straps. "Our doctors are the ones who were able to repair your original injuries, as well as the secondary damage caused by the freezing. As I said, I'm just your tutor. It's my job to help you to adjust to life in our time." Wallach sat up on the edge of the table and Reema giggled. "Isn't it *wonderful?!* Just look at you!"

Wallach threw back his head and howled like a dog, exorcising the last memories of the terrible pain, celebrating life. The air in his lungs left a metallic aftertaste, but it would do. It would certainly do. He ran his hands over his body but could find no trace of injury, not even a scar. And his mind seemed perfectly clear. He congratulated himself on his cleverness.

"How's the stock market?"

"Excuse me?"

"The *stock market.* How is it? I made arrangements for a special fund to continue after my death."

"I'm sure it's just fine," Reema said brightly. "We'll look it up in the library first chance we get. In the meantime—"

"What do you mean, you'll look it up in the library? Hey, what the hell year is this?"

"Oh dear, Mr. Wallach, my math is so. . .Just a moment, please." Reema closed her eyes, crossed her arms over her chest and tapped her foot thoughtfully. "Let's see, now. Converting to the Gregorian calendar. . .ah, I've got it! In your

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reckoning of time, it's 5694. June," she added, sounding very pleased with herself.

For the first time Wallach looked away from the woman's body. He did some quick calculating of his own, and swallowed hard.

"In other words, you're telling me that I've been dead for 3,724 years."

"Right up! Isn't that groovering?!"

"Groovy," Wallach said absently.

"Yes, *groovy,*" Reema sighed, clapping her hands together. "Oh, it's going to be *so* nice tutoring you. I'll be able to brush up on Twentieth Century colloquialisms."

But Wallach wasn't listening; he was lost in thought, staring down into a pit 37 centuries deep. He thought he saw some interesting things there. "Damn," he said softly. "With all my special accounts, assuming a normal rate of economic growth, I must be a multi-billionaire by now." Suddenly he snapped his fingers and glanced back up at Reema. "Okay, tutor, now listen good; I like your bod. . .I like you. You'll work for me. I'll double whatever your boss is paying you. Now, there are a few things that have to be taken care of. First, I want to get in touch with a good lawyer. No offense, but for what I paid to set this whole operation up it shouldn't have taken your outfit 3,724 years to bring me back. I think I have good grounds for a law suit. After that, I want the names and addresses of all the others like me. There must be thousands, and all of them merrily babbling away about what life was like before any of you were born. And they're probably doing it for free. No more of that crap. You want Instant History, you'll have to pay for it. I want to set up a corporation, put everybody you've thawed out under contract. After that—" Wallach paused. Reema was staring at him strangely. "Listen, are you going to be able to remember all of this?"

"Mr. Wallach," Reema said anxiously, "I am sorry if we've inconvenienced you, but you were the last. We wanted to make sure that everything would be just perfect."

"What the hell do you mean, 'the last'? The last what?"

Reema shrugged helplessly. "Just the *last,* Mr. Wallach."

"Well, how many others *were* there?"

"Seventeen. Of course, it's always possible that we'll find more capsules, but—"

"*Seventeen?!* There were thousands, *tens* of thousands of people freezing their bodies!"

"That is encouraging, Mr. Wallach. I can see it's going to be very stimulating working with you."

"Yeah? We'll see how stimulated you people are by a class-action suit. What happened to the others?"

"Oh, they're very well taken care of, I can assure you. Their health is perfect, but they're not at all communicative. You see, with the first sixteen, we had to take more than we could give. We just didn't *know* enough."

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"Take? What did you do to those people?!"

"We didn't do anything, Mr. Wallach, except heal their bodies. And all we took was knowledge, knowledge of your language, your customs, your way of looking at things. You see, this was the problem; while we were learning, there was no time to help the others adjust to the grand design of things, to make them see—"

"Hey," Wallach said, cutting her off, "you're an American, aren't you?"

"I'm *sure* I am," Reema said, once again clapping her hands together. "There's one more thing we can look up in the library!"

Wallach fought against a growing sense of panic. He pushed himself off the table, walked quickly across the room and yanked at the draperies that covered the wall from floor to ceiling. On the other side of the glass, two hundred feet below him, New York City spread her legs. Four blocks to the north, the Empire State building rose into the sooty air. Judging from the dress of the women in the street, the battle between Mini, Midi and Maxi was still in full sway.

He found it hard to believe that the view from his office window had not changed in 3,724 years.

"Mr. Wallach, what are you doing?"

Wallach ignored the anxiety in Reema's voice and continued to advance on her.

"Somebody's putting me on, baby. It's time for the acid test."

"I'm sure we'll find that in the library, Mr. Wallach."

"I'm going to the library right now, kid, and I'm going to do a little basic research. And don't look so damn surprised. *You're* the ones who put my plumbing back together. What the hell do you expect, the way you're standing there? How would *you* feel if you were me and hadn't had a woman in 3,000 years?"

"Oh, dear," Reema said, looking down at her body. "I've done something wrong."

"Joke or no joke, heaven or hell, everything's just right," Wallach said, starting to strip off his hospital gown. "Except that *I'm* the one who's going to be doing the tutoring, at least for the next few minutes."

"Oh dear."

Wallach felt, rather than saw, the brief flash of light like the wink of a strobe somewhere behind his eyes. There was the whistling of wind inside his mind, and the woman standing before him was suddenly caked with the residue of age. Old and wrinkled, the empty sacks that were her breasts hanging down on her chest, Reema stared at him with pale, watery eyes.

Wallach backed away until he bumped up against the table. He gripped the edges and somehow forced the words up around the ball of terror in his throat that was choking him. "You...you're not *real! None* of this is real! I...I...

The skies of North America, Europe

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and Asia darken with yellow smoke that spreads around the globe, blocking out the sun. Beneath the artificial clouds people cough and choke, then tear at each other in their rage and helplessness. Everywhere there are men, scurrying over the face of the planet like maggots on a piece of rotting meat. Freed now from even those tenuous bonds of past rationalizations, armies march at will. Whoopee boom. Boom boom. In space, the earth glows brightly like a neon sign. Finally all is quiet, and there is peace, and all is just as it should be.

This time Wallach came out of it mad.

"Commie!" he screamed, pointing a trembling finger at Reema. Then he stopped, his rage diminished somewhat by the fact that the old Reema—that is to say, the young Reema—was back. Wallach dug deep into himself, trying to recapture some of his anger; it came up a self-pitying whine. "I know communist propaganda when I see it. You can't fool me. I'm betting it happened. It really happened! I'm betting that underneath all the American skin you're a yellow, slanty-eyed Chink."

"Say, Mr. Wallach! We'll go look that up in the library! It may make you feel better!"

Wallach suggested an alternative use for the library.

"Well, I'm sure we can find *that* in the lib. . .Mr. Wallach? Please don't cry, Mr. Wallach."

Wallach blubbered something that was largely unintelligible.

"I'm sorry about what happened before. I shouldn't have changed like that, but you did frighten me. Our probes had indicated that that *was* a form you would find most pleasing. When you started to act funny, well, I guess I panicked and changed to a less desirable form. I was afraid I'd done something wrong. Please forgive me. You see, we do have an extensive library; but, after all, you can only gather so much from sixteen people. We'd so hoped you'd be able to fill in some of the gaps."

Wallach was back at the window, staring out at New York City.

"What did you say, Mr. Wallach? I can't hear you."

"I said, boy, were they off." He turned back to Reema, making no effort to blink back his tears. "Look, I didn't know it was going to be like this, Reema. Believe me, if I had I'd have lived a lot differently."

"Huh?"

"All this business," Wallach said, making a sweeping gesture with his hand. "I took the Big Fall, right? I mean, I really bought it, right?"

"Mr. Wallach, I know the mention of the library seems to upset you, but I—"

"Don't I even get to plead my case? Listen, I know I did a lot of things wrong—"

"Oh, *no*, Mr. Wallach!" Suddenly, Reema was laughing. "You don't understand at all! You did nothing *wrong*. My goodness! If you only knew how much we *respect* you.

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Why, jeepers-creepers, just from the little we've learned from our probes, it astounds us that your people came so *close* to upsetting the whole applescooter. I mean, it appears that a remarkable number of you really groovered on the whole sheboodle."

"What appleshe. . .what the hell are you talking about?" Wallach sniffled and turned back to New York City.

"Why you almost succeeded in altering the pattern, the great design of things. Of course, it's much more difficult to gain a proper perspective on such things when you're right in the middle of them. That's why we want to go slow, give you time to adjust to things as they are. Remember, there is always an interrelationship between everything in nature, a design."

"Cut the crap," Wallach said evenly. Below him, a horse with nine legs lifted three of them and urinated on a fire hydrant. "Give it to me straight."

"Oh, dear, Mr. Wallach—"

"Just tell me right out what's going on," Wallach said with new resolve. "If you don't, I won't talk to you anyway. I won't say a word. And while you're at it, get rid of all these pictures in my head. I don't need them and, besides, you haven't got them right anyway."

"Mr. Wallach, I'll be in a lot of trouble if I hammer things up."

"You'll be in a lot of trouble if I stop talking too. Do what I told you."

"All right, Mr. Wallach," Reema said uncertainly. "Just please remember to try to look on the bright side of things; after all, if you hadn't *been*, we wouldn't *be*. And, what with you and the sixteen others, it's not as if your species was *completely* extinct."

Again, a wink of light and Wallach found himself gazing out on a bleak, iridescent landscape that pulsed with radioactive energy. Shapes moved in the harsh blur, slug-like things scurrying to and fro, then disappearing down their burrows in the ground.

"How's the air in here, Mr. Wallach? I assure you we want to do everything humidly puddible to make your—"

But Wallach wasn't listening. He had already resolved never to hear or look at whatever it was that was standing behind him in the room. Not ever.

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R. A. Lafferty has been gathering accolades for his novels (PAST MASTER, FOURTH MANSIONS and most recently, ARRIVE AT EASTERWINE) in recent years, and it's a pleasure to welcome him back with his first story here since "Camels and Dromedaries, Clem," October 1967. The new Lafferty is a typically inventive tale about the sixth expedition to the planet Aphthonia; the previous five had returned with one comment only: "You'd never believe it," on which they had not elaborated.

World Abounding

by R.A. LAFFERTY

HOW MANY HABITABLE worlds there are depends on the meaning given to "habitable" and to "world." "Habitable without special equipment and conditioning" is the usual restriction on the first. "Of no mean size and of no extreme distance" are two common conditions of the second. Thus Roulettenwelt and Kentron-Kosmon are really asteroids, too small to be worlds. But how about Hokey Planet and such? And how about the distant travelers'-tale worlds?

Butler lists only seventeen habitable worlds, limiting them to the fair-sized and generally hospitable worlds of Sol and of the Centauri Suns. So all these were closely grouped. The early notion that double or triple suns would not have planets because of their irregularity had been an erroneous estimate, fortunately.

Thus, revolving around Sol there is only Gaea (Earth). Around the Sun Proxima (the Grian Sun) are Kentauron-Mikron, Camiroi, Astrobe, and Dahae. Around the Sun Alpha are Skandia, Pudibundia, Analos, the equivalently named twins with such different superior fauna, Proavitus and Paravata, and Skokumchuck (the Shelni Planet). Around the Sun Beta are the three trader planets, Emporion, Apateon, and Kleptis; tricky places, it is said. But if you think the traders are tricky, how about the other three Beta Planets? These are Aphthonia (also called World Abounding), Bellota (Butler lists this as a planet, though there are larger bodies listed as asteroids; he says, however, that Bellota in its

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present creation is much larger than its size of record, a puzzling statement), and Aranea (or the Spider Planet).

These latter three are habitable by all definitions, but they are generally uninhabited, each for its own unclear reason. It was to clear up the reason and impediment concerning Aphthonia, or World Abounding, that a party was now in descending hover.

"We are on this mission because of one phrase, repeated by leaders of five different parties, and maintained in the face of vigorous courts martial," Fairbridge Exendine, the singling leader, said with a sort of hooked wonder. "I have never been able to get that phrase out of my mind. 'You'd never believe it' was the phrase, and the men of the five parties, of the more than twenty parties in fact, would not elaborate on it much."

"I hardly believe it either," Judy Brindlesby said, "and I haven't been there yet. It almost jumps at you. There is certainly no other world that presents so pleasant an appearance from medium hover. The continent named Aegea and the howling beauty of those oceans and seas that invade it so deeply! The river named Festinatio, the largest *clear* river on any world! The volcano named Misericors! Why should a river be named 'I hurry' and a volcano be named the 'merciful'?"

"It was John Chancel who named them," Rushmore Planda said with that curious reverence which all use in speaking of the great explorer. "And it was he who first said that this was the finest world ever, and that it should be left alone to be just that."

World Abounding had been visited by the great John Chancel just fifty years before. He had been the first Gaea man on very many of the worlds. It was John Chancel who said that only men should go to work on World Abounding, that it was no place to raise a family. Later he repented even of this and said that nobody at all should go there.

Chancel had stated that World Abounding was the most generous and fertile world ever, and that its very generosity would blow one's mind. It was his opinion that this was the Hasty Planet of the earliest travelers' tales, and that there was something very much too hasty about it. And he said that the most famous product of World Abounding should never be used at more than one-thousandth strength.

Gorgos, the magic animal and plant hormone (it wasn't that, but such was the popular explanation of it) came from World Abounding. Cut it a thousand times and it still was the magic growth-trigger. Ah, why cut it at all though? Why not take it at the full where it abounded in its fullness? To be spooked off by too much of a good thing was childish. "Let us examine it as scientists and adults," Fairbridge said as they came into lower hover, "as balanced persons who know what we are about."

The seven balanced persons who

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knew what they were about were Fairbridge, Exendine, the canny commander; the Brindlesbys, Judy and Hilary; the Plandas, Erma and Rushmore; the Kirwins, Lisetta and Blase. They were three couples and one remarkable singling, a superior microcosm.

They came down easily and safely from low hover, as twenty-two parties had come down before (twenty-three if one counts the solo voyage of John Chancel). They were pleasantly staggered by the sudden green power of that place. There was no need of any caution: nobody of any party had ever suffered even slight injury or sickness on World Abounding. They found such generosity as would gladden any mind and body. It would be difficult, initially, to be scientist and adult about World Abounding.

Well, revel in the joy then. Afterwards, analyze it all minutely; but without losing any of that joyousness. *Do not complain too strenuously about a stacked deck if it is all stacked in your favor.*

They were on the Terraces—"Which aren't mentioned by John Chancel at all," Erma Planda said with a toss of her whole golden body, "and it is only gradually that members of the other parties begin to mention them. Could the Terraces have grown up in fifty standard years?"

The Terraces formed a great stepped, elongated plateau, overcome with its own lushness. From the great green, broad height of the hovercraft landing, the Terraces tumbled down seventy meters in more than twenty giant steps to the plain. This was all between the volcano and the river, and the Terraces had shoved out into the river to produce gracious rapids with their musical foam.

"Yes, the Terraces have apparently grown in fifty years, or have been spewed out by the volcano named Merciful," Fairbridge said. "Chancel described the plain between the volcano and the river and he didn't mention the Terraces at all. He set up a spire for monument in the middle of the plain, and where is it now? I believe that it is engulfed in the Terraces, and I intend to find it. I also intend to find why some of the later parties refer to the Terraces as the Graves. No member of any party died here. All returned. I have a sudden exuberance come over me, and I'll start my digging now."

And Fairbridge Exendine had already set the earth-augers to cutting down into the Terraces.

"I have my own new exuberance," Judy Brindlesby shouted like a whole covey of trumpets. "Hilary, my clay-headed hero, we will make luscious life together all day and all night."

Judy was large, but surpassingly shapely and graceful, like a hovercraft. Her brindled black-red hair was so weighty and enveloping that a lesser woman could hardly have carried it; and, really, it seemed to be growing by the minute, like the grass there. One couldn't actually quite see

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the World Abounding grass grow, but one could hear it; it was a pleasant squeaking sound that it made. And there was a hint of quick music about Judy's heavy hair that indicated that it was growing and growing.

"Yes, it is volcanic ash," Rushmore Planda was saying as he joined Fairbridge at the earth-augers. "It is quite airy ash." The volcanic ash was chalky white to pearl gray. Then it had a streak of green in it, and another.

"You are through the first stratum, Fairbridge," Rushmore said, "and into a layer of compressed vegetation that hasn't even rotted yet. This is the vegetation that was recently the top of the second stratum; very recently, I believe. This is a curious pile of terraces."

"Oh, it's a holy pyramid," Erma Planda told them all, "and the volcano built it especially for the holy people, ourselves. John Chancel said that he always felt himself to be a holy man when he first set foot on a good new world. I feel myself to be a holy woman now."

"Do not stuff yourself, holy woman," her man Rushmore told her. "Chancel preached temperance in all things. Do you have to eat everything you see? Do you have to eat *all* of everything you see?"

"Yes, I have to, I have to! And was it not the great John Chancel (he who first warned against this place) who said that there was no possibility of poisoning on World Abounding? Oh, and he said that there was no possibility of overindulgence here either. He stated that the essence Gorgos has no limits, but that it pretends that it has. Everything that can be chewed or swallowed here is safe to eat or drink. There is no insect or animal that bites, nor worm that gnaws, nor moth that harms. There'll be no extreme heat or cold. The nineteen-day polar tumble combined with the diurnal rotation keeps it all breezy and invigorating. Invigorating, yes, yes, extremely so. More than invigorating. It's a pretty horny world actually. Rather a rambunctious feeling it gives one. More than that, it—"

"What has happened to all you girl-folk?" the leader Fairbridge asked, rather puzzled and almost alarmed. "I have never seen you so wild-eyed and charged."

"Poor Fairbridge," Judy Brindlesby needled him. "Never mind, Fairbridge, I'll *get* you a girl. I'll get you one within a standard month, I promise you."

"Impossible, sweet Judy, unless you slay your own mate. We're to be here for a long year, or until we solve the problem, and nobody else will touch down. Where would you get me a girl?"

"That I don't know. But the very rocks are singing to me 'You'll get a girl, Judy, you'll get a girl for old Fairbridge within a month.' "

"Gorgos is not merely a magic animal and plant hormone," Rushmore Planda was speaking with a

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suddenly improved, with a new and magnificent voice. "It's a way of life, I see that now. It will impose its own shape on my wife, however much she stuffs herself. It will impose its shape on everything. It is a new pace and a new sort of life."

"It may be that its pace is too fast," Fairbridge warned.

"Makes no difference. There can't be any other pace here. Get the song of those romping birds there! It's the same beat that Gaea lunatics, treated with Gorgos, begin to sing with as soon as their sure-cure begins. Get the whole stimulating, pleasant, almost drunken smell of this planet! Here is not so much the uncanny feel of things seen before, but of things smelled before. All great smells (Can one speak of great smells? Yes, one can.) have a reminiscent element, but with *this* it is reminiscent of a future. There is a pleasurable mustiness here, that's sure, but it isn't of past time; it's of future time, long waiting, and now beginning to unfold suddenly."

"You men are drunk on only the expectation of wine," Lisetta Kirwin said. "But the one thing I remember from the journal of the great John Chancel was the recipe for making morning wine in nine minutes on World Abounding. And I've already started it. Time's a-running."

Lisetta was crushing purple fruit into a huge calathus, or basket cup, made by pulling the inner corolla out of a giant flower bloom.

"It would be chemically possible to make a potable fruit alcohol in nine minutes," Blase Kirwin said, "but it wouldn't be wine. It wouldn't have the bouquet. It wouldn't have the—but it has it. I smell that it has it already; and it grows. Here, here, let me swig that—"

"No, no, it isn't ready," Lisetta protested. "It still moves itself, it lends its color to the cup, it bites like a serpent."

"Look out, serpent and wife, I'll bite back. Have at you!" And Blase Kerwin took a huge draught from the green cup. He turned a bit green himself, but cheerfully so. He lost his voice, and he did a little dance on one foot while he grasped his throat with both hands, but he was quite pleased about it all. There are some things too good to wait for.

"A little patience," Lisetta said. "Four minutes yet."

Blase still hadn't his speech back, but he could howl his high pleasure over the breath-taking encounter. And soon, quite soon, they were all lushy over the singing, heady stuff. It was very difficult to be scientific and adult about World Abounding.

So they probed the world very unscientifically and kiddishly, except Fairbridge and Rushmore, who still probed the levels of the Terraces. The three ladies especially were happy maniacs, and they were all over that abundant land. They caught and rode huge gangling animals. After all, on the word of Chancel and others, everything was harmless here. They wrestled with big starfish in the river named Festinatio. They ate the snapoff tails of huge lizards and sent them away

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bawling and running on their two hind legs. Never mind; the big lizards could regrow their snapoff tails.

"Those five party leaders who wrote 'You'd never believe it', do you think they were laughing when they wrote it?" Judy Brindlesby exploded the question when she clambered once back up to the diggings.

"One of them, I believe, wrote in laughter, Judy," Fairbridge said. "And one of them, I know for certain, wrote in absolute horror. I don't know about the other three."

"I suggest, Fairbridge, that we clear out a square about five meters on a side and excavate the whole top level of it," Rushmore Planda said. "I believe that there is more mystery buried here than we have met in all our lives."

"All right, we will do that," Fairbridge agreed. "The least we can do is see what is right under our feet."

"But not there!" Judy trumpeted at them. "Dig here where the people are."

"What people, Judy?" Fairbridge asked her patiently. "All the people who have ever been on this world have been accounted for."

"Not till we account for them they haven't been. How do I know what people they are till you dig them up? Dig carefully, though; they are real people here. You call yourselves diggers, and you don't even know where the people are buried."

"We dig where you say, Judy. You are a people-witcher in your several ways."

"But don't dig all the time. You're missing it. Life is being lived today and tonight." And she was off again, leaping down the three-meter steps of the Terraces.

"I don't know what she means," Fairbridge said as he set the excavators to work and then adjusted them to Slow and Careful. "I hardly ever know what she means."

"I believe that I know what she means, Fairbridge," Rushmore said in an eerie voice with a scarcely human chuckle in it.

So the excavators excavated, moving the light volcanic ash that was below the vegetation. There was real mystery in the ash. That stuff was not completely dead.

"One thing I like about it here is the size of the party," Fairbridge mumbled as he sensed something near and put the excavators on Very Slow. "Seven. That's right, that's just right. That's just how many persons should be on a world. More than that is a crowd. But a man cannot live pleasantly alone. What do you think about that, Rushmore? Isn't seven about right? Rushmore?

"He's gone. The party isn't seven now. It's one, me. I'm alone. I suspect that they have chosen the better part, though. Yes, I know what Judy meant, and it does come in very strongly here. But it isn't just with them; it's coming up from the very ground here. I'll dig on."

Fairbridge dug down till he came to the people.

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It was night. Ancilla, the smaller moon, was overhead; Matrona, the larger moon, had just arisen. Fairbridge went to find the three couples of the party. "They all have the new exuberance on them, and they make luscious life together all day and all night. But I have to tell them what I have found."

It would be easiest to find Judy Brindlesby, the liveliest of them all. Wherever she was, any man near would know it by special sensing. Fairbridge's special sensing led him to a river meadow and into a high brake of reeds that still squeaked from sudden new growth. Judy lay there with her clay-headed hero and husband Hilary.

It was a magnificent Judy stretched on her back in giggling slumber. Hilary, chuckling with pleasure, lay atop her and was cutting her hair with great shears: cutting her incredible hair, cutting her superabundant hair, cutting the *mountains* of her hair. He had sheared off great heaps of it, possibly twenty kilograms of it, and she still had more than she'd had that afternoon.

"You are almost completely hidden in the reeds, Hilary," Fairbridge said then. "I'd never have found you, except that any man can sense Judy's presence."

"Hullo, Fairbridge," Hilary grunted pleasantly. "The reeds weren't here when we lay down. They've grown up since. Everything that touches her grows, and she is enlivened wherever she touches this ground. Look at her hair, Fairbridge. She's in accord with it here. Gorgos or whatever the growth element is, she's with it. So am I."

"I dug down to people in the Terraces, Hilary."

"Yes. Judy said there would be people there."

Fairbridge and Hilary went and took Rushmore from the sleeping arms of Erma in the blue-stem hills. And they met Lisetta and Blase Kirwin coming out of the orchards.

"Lisetta says that you have dug down to people," Blase cried vividly. "Oh, for the love of abundant Aphthonia, let's go see what this is about!"

"I've dug down to people, yes," Fairbridge said, "but how could Lisetta know it?"

They climbed up the tall Terraces and came to the open shaft.

"We will remove the rest of the volcanic dust and crust from about them," Fairbridge said. "And when old Beta Sun comes up, we can get a good look at them."

"Oh, this is fine enough light for it," Lisetta Kirwin said. "Aren't they nice people, though. So friendly. We will get acquainted with them before the brighter light is on them. It's best to become acquainted with good people in dim light first, especially when they've been through an odd experience. Then they'll brighten up with the light."

There were twelve of the people there, twelve adults. They were seated, apparently, on stone benches

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around a stone table: the details would be known when the rest of the volcanic dust had been cleared away and when Beta Sun was risen. The twelve were got up in a gala and festive way. They had sat eating and drinking when it came over them, *but they were not taken by surprise.* It was a selective volcanic thrust that had covered them. It came only onto the Terraces that had become a shoulder of the volcano. The people needn't have sat and waited while it covered them. The surrounding plains hadn't been covered by the volcanic thrust.

"Why, they're pleasantly dead, and not at all decayed," Lisetta cried. "They are really such nice people. Don't they seem so to the rest of you? There is something almost familiar about a few of them—as if I had met them before."

"How long?" Fairbridge asked Hilary Brindlesby.

"Two years, maybe. They haven't been dead longer than that."

"You're crazy, Hilary. You are the tissue man of this party. Take tissue samples."

"I will, of course. But they've been dead for about two years."

"Then they were alive here when the Whiteoak party was here."

"Likely."

"Then why didn't Commander Harry Whiteoak mention them?"

"Whiteoak was one of those, Fairbridge, who used the phrase 'You'd never believe it'," Rushmore Planda cut in. "Maybe he figured that covered it all."

"But who are they?" Fairbridge persisted. "Every person of every expedition has been accounted for. These are our own sort of people, but they aren't people of the Whiteoak party. I've met all the Whiteoaks, and all came back."

"Aren't they of the Whiteoak party, Fairbridge?" Blase asked with an air of discovery. "You'd better pray that the light doesn't get any better, man. You're near spooked now. There's a couple of ghosts there: an ear, a brow, a jaw slope. And that lady there, isn't she a little like another lady we met, enough like her to be a sister or daughter? I tell you that there are strong resemblances to several of the Whiteoaks people here."

"You're crazy. The Whiteoaks were here for only six standard months. If they met these mysterious people, why didn't they give an account of it?"

They didn't do much more with it till daylight. They moved some of the volcanic filler and uncovered to a little more depth.

"Can you prop under this level and leave these people here and then excavate the layer under them?" Lisetta Kirwin asked.

"We can, but why?" Fairbridge inquired. Fairbridge was jumpy. He didn't seem to appreciate how nice it was to come onto such a nice group of people.

"Oh, I think that these people picked a spot that had been picked time and time again before them."

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Along about daylight, Judy Brindlesby and Erma Planda, with a variety of noises, came up to the others on the Terraces.

"Folks, are we ever sick!" Judy sounded out. "I'm sicker than Erma, though. I go further into things than she does. Don't you wish you were sick the way we are, Lisetta?"

"But I am, I am," Lisetta said, "and it didn't take me all night to find out. It's fun, isn't it."

"Sure it is. I never had so much fun being sick in my life." And Judy retched funfully.

It was a little unusual that all three ladies should show first signs of pregnancy at the same time. It was odd that they should all have morning sickness. Oddest of all was their being so delighted with their sickness. There was something about World Abounding that seemed to make all experience, even nausea, a happy experience.

And the dead people in the Terraces—

"—They are the happiest looking dead people I ever did see," Erma Planda declared. "I will have to know what they are so happy about. They would tell me if I had the proper ears to listen. It's hard to hear when it comes to you by that way. What, dear? What are you saying?"

"I wasn't saying anything, Erma," Rushmore told her.

"Wasn't talking to you, Rushmore," Erma said with a flick of her golden body. "What, dear? I can't quite make it out." And Erma Planda thumped her body as if to get better reception.

"Your ears aren't in your belly, Erma," Rushmore reminded her.

"Oh, well, maybe some of them are. No, I just get it a little at a time what they are so happy about."

The happy dead people had been preserved by the volcanic fill, and perhaps by the eseence Gorgos or some other substance of World Abounding. They didn't feel dead. They were rather waxy to the touch; they were about as warm as the air, and they hadn't any clamminess; there was even a slight resiliency to them which is usually a property of live flesh and not of dead flesh. They were clad in the light native garments of World Abounding. They were, in some manner hard to reconcile, kindred to the members of the Whiteoak expedition. They were beautiful and mysterious people, but they didn't mean to be mysterious. They'd have told you anything you wanted to know if only proper accord might be established between dead tongue and live ear.

But was there not something a little bit too glib about the impressions that all these new explorers received from the dead folks? Yes, a little too glib here and there, but how could anyone be blamed for that?

"Just a minute nevertheless," Lisetta Kirwin was saying both to the dead people and to the live. "We all say, or we all think, that you, our good friends here, are clad in the

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light native garments of World Abounding. Our good commander Fairbridge, in fact, has just scribbled those very words in his notebook. But how did we know what the light native garments of World Abounding should look like since we never saw any of them before? And since there has never been, for the record, any human native on World Abounding, never been any human being born here, hasn't this all a fishy smell? Or has it? For I recall now that the fish of World Abounding have a pleasant fruity smell. Well, take your time, folks. Being dead, you are in no hurry, and I am not; but tell us about it when you get to it."

They sank a second shaft beside the first. They ran reinforcing timbers under the place of the pleasant dead people so that they would not be disturbed or collapsed. Then they dug the second shaft down through the volcanic fill to the next level of vegetation. There was an unexpected thing: it had been done before; they were excavating an old excavation.

They cleared the space below the dead people (and it showed every sign of having been cleared before); they came, as they had weirdly known that they must, to another clutch of dead people. They had been expecting just that, but they were stunned by it even more than by first discovery or first report.

"How many times, do you think?" Fairbridge asked them all in real wonder.

"I guess twenty-two times," Hilary squinted. "There are, in all, twenty-two levels to the Terraces."

"Would a colossal joker, a daemonical joker, a supernal joker, a godly joker, even an ungodly joker pull the same joke twenty-two times in a row? Wouldn't it begin to pall even on him after twenty-two times of it?"

"Not a bit of it," Erma said. "Whoever he is, he still thinks thunder is funny, and he's pulled the thunder-joke billions and billions of times. And he laughs every time. Listen for the giggle sometimes; it comes around the edge of every thunder."

Slight differences only this time. The dead people of the second level down numbered eleven adults. They had been dead a little longer than the first, but they hadn't been dead for more than four or five years. They were as well-preserved and as happy-seeming as the upper gentry. They added a bit to the mystery.

Fairbridge and his folks and his excavators continued to excavate, about one level a day. All the shafts that they dug now had already been dug out several times before. At the fifth level down they came to the tip of the spire or steeple that John Chancel had built as monument on the plain between the volcano and the river. They knew that it was older than the Terraces, that it went all the way down to the flat land; they also knew that it was only fifty years old.

There were sixteen of the gracious

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and pleasantly dead people on this level. They had made a circular stone table around the tip of the spire where it came through the lower Terrace. They had wined and dined themselves there while they waited for the volcano named Merciful to cover them up. But who were these people, so beautiful and so pleasant and so dead, arranged on levels of several years apart?

"The mystery gets deeper all the time," Fairbridge said weightily.

"Yes, it gets about three meters deeper every day," Hilary grinned. "Anybody got any strange stories to add to this?"

"Yes, I've a strange one," Judy told them. "I know that it seems pretty short notice, and I had no idea that it could be so far along, and I'm sure that it's completely impossible, but my time is upon me right now."

They all gaped at her.

"I said Right Now, Hilary," Judy told her husband in an almost tight voice, "and I mean right now."

Well, Judy was large (though as shapely and graceful as a hovercraft), and the issue would apparently be quite small. But all of them had scientific eyes, trained to notice things large and small, and none of them had noticed that it would be so soon with Judy.

There was no trouble, of course. Hilary himself was a doctor. So was Blase. So, come to think of it, was Lisetta Kirwin. But Lisetta herself was feeling a bit imminent. No trouble, though. On World Abounding, everything happens easily and pleasantly and naturally. Judy Brindlesby, easily and pleasantly, gave birth to a very small girl.

Well, it was less ugly than most babies, less a red lump and more of a formed thing. And quite small. There was a spate of words from all of them, but no words could convey the unusual formliness of the very little girl.

"She is really pretty, and I never thought I'd say that about a baby, even my own," Hilary bleated proudly. "She is so small and so perfect. She is the least lass I ever saw."

"She is wonderful, she is beautiful, there has never been anyone like her," Judy was chanting in ecstasy, "she is perfect, she shines like a star, she sparkles like an ocean, she is the most enchanting ever, she is—"

"Oh, cool it, Mother, cool it," the Least Lass said.

Fairbridge Exendine reacted in absolute horror to this, and he remained in a state of horrified rejection. The others, however, accepted it pretty gracefully. Explanations were called for, of course. Well then, let us seek the explanations.

"There has to be an answer to the Case of the Precocious Little Girl," Rushmore said. "Does anyone have an answer?"

"She's yours, Judy," Erma said. "You tell us if we heard what we thought we heard."

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"Oh, I thought she talked quite plain enough, and I'm sure you heard what she said. But why should you ask me about it when she is right here? How did you learn to talk, dear?" Judy asked her little daughter, the Least Lass.

"Five days in the belly of a chatterbox and I shouldn't have learned talk?" the Least Lass asked with a fine irony in one so young. So the explanation was simple enough: the little girl had learned to talk from her mother.

But Fairbridge Exendine was still gray-faced with horror. And she didn't belong to that singling at all. Why should he be so affected by this?

"Do you know that you are the first human child ever born on World Abounding?" Judy asked her child a little later.

"Oh, Mother, I'm sure you're mistaken," Least Lass said. "I was under the impression that I was the two hundred and first."

"Can you walk?" Blase Kerwin asked the little girl a little later yet.

"Oh, I doubt it very much," she said. "It will be a standard hour before I even attempt it. It may be a standard day before I do it perfectly."

But Fairbridge Exendine had gone back to his digging now. He was in new horror of the mystery of the excavations, but he was still more in horror of the little girl.

Yet she was the prettiest child that anyone had ever seen—so far.

"Anything that we do is always anticlimactic to whatever Judy does," Erma Planda said with mock complaint. Erma, with her golden body and her greater beauty, wasn't really jealous of Judy Brindlesby. Neither was Lisetta Kirwin with her finer features and her quicker intelligence. Both knew that Judy would always anticipate them in everything. She had certainly done it in this, though by no more than a couple hours.

"Well, it's surely a puzzle," Rushmore Planda was talking pleasantly that day or the next. "We are all human persons. And the gestation period for humans is more than five days."

"Don't—don't talk about it," Fairbridge stuttered. "Dig—dig, man."

"Of course it's possible that the three conceptions took place nine months ago. That's the logical thing to believe, but a little illogical bug keeps croaking to me. 'You know better than that.' And all three of the children say that they were in the bellies for only five days. There was certainly an extraordinary enlivening in all of us that first night here, except in you, Fairbridge."

"Don't—damn—talk about it. Dig—damn—dig."

"This is a miracle world, of course, and it is full of miracle substances. Nevertheless, I believe that the Miracle-Master is a little grotesque in this trick. I love my own small son beyond telling, yet I feel

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that there is something in him that is not of myself and is not of Erma. Part of his parentage is World Abounding."

"Don't–don't talk crazy. None–none of this has happened. Dig–dig, man."

There was never a scareder or more nervous man than Fairbridge. He buried himself in the digging work to get away from it; he'd buried himself near forty-five meters deep in the excavating work by this time. Oh, that man was edgy!

"I imagine that the same thing happens on Gaea," Rushmore was rambling on. "We were, for most of the centuries, so close to it that we couldn't see that the planet was the third parent in every conception. We saw it only a little when we came to Camiroi and Dahae and Analos: a twenty-day shorter gestation period in the one case, a twelve-day longer one in another. We were a long time guessing that there is no such thing as biology without environment. But who could have guessed that World Abounding would be so extreme?"

"Don't–don't talk about it," Fairbridge begged. "Thirty days, dam–dammit, and four–fourteen of them gone already. Dig, dig."

"What thirty days, Fairbridge? Is there a thirty-day period mentioned of our expedition? I don't know of it. Fairbridge, man, you only dig because you're afraid to wonder. Whoever saw children grow so much in nine days? But then there are trees here that grow twenty meters high in one day. And look at the way the hair grows on Judy Brindlesby, and she a human! Not that the children aren't human, not that they aren't two-thirds earth-human even.

"Fairbridge, those are the three smartest children that anybody ever saw. When I was their age (Oh, damn, I don't mean nine days old, I mean their apparent age of nine or ten years old), when I was their age, I wasn't anything like as sharp as they are, and I was rated as smart. And who ever saw such handsome people anywhere? They're on par with the dead people here in the Terraces. Do you believe that they're of the same genesis?"

"D–dig, man, or drop dead, but don't–don't talk about it. It isn't there. It hasn't happened."

"Erma thinks that the children have rapport with the dead people here in the Terraces. After all, they are one-third blood kindred. They all have one common parent, World Abounding. Erma also thinks that all three children are coming to their puberty period now. She believes that the pubescent manifestations here will be much stronger, much more purposive, much more communal than anything on Gaea or Camirioi or Dahae. The useless and vestigial poltergeistic manifestations of Gaea-Earth will not compare with them at all, she believes. Was there ever such frustrating failures in communicating as the whole poltergeist business?

"Erma believes that the manifestations here will go even beyond the three-angel paradoxes of the pubes-

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cents on Kentauron-Mikron. And why should these things not go beyond? We had premonitions of such wonderful weirdnesses even on our own world. My mate Erma believes that these puberty insights (the volcano is a part and person of these insights) will begin very soon. Two more days; three at the most."

"D–dig, man. Don't–don't think."

Coming of Age on World Abounding is a closed subject. It is not closed in the sense of being at all secret or restricted, but in being a thing closed upon itself. From its very beginning it is conscious of its resolution.

Least Lass Brindlesby, Heros Planda, and Kora Kirwin were paradoxical children. It seems foolish to speak of relaxed intensity, of foolish sagacity, of placid hysteria, of happy morbidity, of lively death-desire. The children had all these qualities and others as contradictory. They were at all times in close, wordless communication with their parents and with all other persons present, and they were at the same time total aliens. The children were puzzling, but they themselves certainly weren't puzzled; they were always quite clear as to their own aims and activities. They had no more doubt of their direction than the arc of a circle has.

Lisetta Kirwin worried a little that she might have a retarded daughter. It was not that the girl was slow about things, just that she was different about things. Should a nineteen-day-old girl be called retarded because she dislikes reading? Kora could read, most of the time. Whenever her intuitions cocked their ears with a little interest, she could go right to the heart of any text. But mostly all three of the children disliked the reading business.

Hilary Brindlesby scolded the children because they showed no sign of the scientific approach or method. But the scientific approach with its systematic study would not have brought them along nearly as fast as they did go. They all had the intuitive approach, and it brought them rapidly to a great body of knowledge.

The children were well acquainted with the dead people in the Terraces. (Fairbridge, in his horror-filled distracting work, had excavated almost all the Terrace levels now.) The children named the names of all the dead people and told of their intricate relationships. Lisetta Kirwin recorded all this from the children. It tied in remarkably with the surnames of the people of the various expeditions.

"You can't really communicate with the dead people of the Terraces," Blase Kirwin told his daughter Kora. "It is just a bit of flamboyant imagination that you all seem to have."

"Oh, they say pretty much the same thing about us and you, Father," Kora said. "They tell us we can't really communicate with such stuffy folks as you who weren't ever born on World Abounding. We

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do communicate with you, though; a little bit, sometimes."

And then one evening, Heros Planda and Kora Kirwin said that they were married.

"Isn't twenty-two days old a little young to marry?" Rushmore Planda asked his son.

"No, I don't believe so, Father," Heros said. "It is the regular age on World Abounding."

"Who married you?" Lisetta Kirwin asked. After all, it had to be somebody who had done it, and there were no human persons on the world except those of the party.

"We don't know his name," Kora said. "We call him Marrying Sam in fun, but lots of the Terrace people have called him that too. We might suppose that that is his name now."

"He isn't a human person? Then what species does he belong to?"

"He doesn't belong to any species, Mother, since he is the only one of his kind. The Volcano says that Marrying Sam is his (the Volcano's) dog. He doesn't look like a dog, as I intuit dogs, though. He can't very well look like anything else, since he is the only one of his kind."

"I see," Lisetta Kirwin said, but she saw it a little cockeyed. She was vaguely disappointed. She had always wanted a grand wedding for her daughter, if she had ever had a daughter. And now the daughter and the wedding had come so close together that something seemed lacking. She didn't know that it had been a very grand wedding, with elementals such as a Volcano and an Ocean participating; she didn't even know that she had participated, along with everything else on World Abounding.

"I thought you would be pleased, Mother, that we had married and regularized our relationship," Kora suggested hopefully.

"Of course I'm pleased. It's just that you seem so young."

Actually, the wedding celebration was not yet completed. Part of it was tangled with an event that involved almost all of them that night. It was similar to the mysterious carnal happenings of the first night of the party on World Abounding.

It was another of those extraordinary enlivening events. It got Erma Planda of the golden body, and Judy Brindlesby of the sometimes incredible hair. It got Lisetta Kirwin of the now-shattered serenity; it got Rushmore and Hilary and Blase.

Perhaps it had been thought that connubial passion happened without regard to place or planet. Such is not the case. And the case on World Abounding was very different from the case on Gaea or Camiroi or Dahae. There was a pleasantness at all times on World Abounding; there was a constant passion of a sort, an almost pantheistic communion of all things together. But there was something else that came on much stronger at special times, that was triggered by special events without an exact time arriving, that was wild and rampant and blood- and seed-pungent.

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It was the rutting season.

Ah, we deck it out better than that. It was a night, or a day and a night, of powerful interior poetry and music, or personal affirmation, of physical and moral and psychic overflowing, of esthetic burgeoning. It was clear crystal passion.

But let us not deck it out so nice that we won't know it. It was the horniest business ever, and it went on all night and all day and all night.

Hilary and Judy Brindlesby: he had the length and the strength; she had the fullness and the abundance. They made such laughing love that it sounded like chuckling thunder in the reed brakes. Even the birds and the conies took up the cadence of it.

Rushmore and Erma Planda: he of the buffalo bulk and the impression of swooping Moses-horns on his head; she of the golden body and the emerald eyes. "They should take the two of us for models," Erma had said on that memorable time twenty-seven nights before. "Nobody has ever done it as we have. We should give lessons."

And then Blase and Lisetta Kirwin—no one will ever know just how it was with them. They had a thing that was too good to share (except in the planet-sharing aspect of it), that was too good to tell about, that was too good even to hint at. But, after such pleasures, they seemed the most pleasured of all the couples.

But Kora and Heros were at home in this. World Abounding was really third flesh of their union in a way that it couldn't be for the others. They held their own pleasures atop the volcanic Terraces, not in the reeds or the blue-stem hills or the orchards as the World-Gaea couples did.

World Abounding is the most passionate of worlds, with the possible exception of Kleptis of the Trader Planets where the rapacity in all things is so towering. The Miracle-Maker of legend and fact on World Abounding was always shocked and bewildered by such coming together as that of Heros and Kora, even though it was a licit relationship and done in the licit manner. It was the depth and violence of it that was beyond law, that almost made the Miracle-Maker doubt that he had made such an indomitable thing as this.

Really, it was the Abounding Time, the name-thing of the world.

The only discordant (ill-fitting, but not completely unpleasant) elements in the thunderous season-time of World Abounding were Fairbridge Exendine, and Least Lass Brindlesby.

"Now I am an old maid out of joint with the time," Least Lass said as she wandered on the hills of her home. Both the smaller moon Ancilla and the larger moon Matrona were a-shine. "My proper mate is unready and unbelieving. My third parent, World Abounding, who is also the third lover of our love, is not sufficiently penetrating. Father of

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Planets, help us! You gave us here the special instruction 'What you do, do quickly': it isn't with us as with other places. Answer me, answer me right now!"

Least Lass threw angry rocks at the sky when she was not answered right now. But there is no time for slow answers on World Abounding.

And Fairbridge (still in the horror that would never leave him, but now touched by something both brighter and deeper) could only bark harshly to himself. "I am a human man. These things cannot be, have not been, must not be allowed to be. They are all hallucination, and this is an hallucinatory world. The monster-child remains monstrous, breath-takingly monstrous. It would be the only love I had ever had, if it could have been, if the case of it were real. How could a human man mate with an imagination, how with a monster, be she a demon or an angel?"

It did not come to these two incongruities, in proper season, as it came to the other persons there.

By second morning, the partaking couples were in a state of dazzling exhaustion. But they knew that they were well fruited, fruited forever. Then there came the several days of golden desuetude. Even the letdowns on World Abounding were wonderful.

All the folks sympathized, of course, with the passion-impounded Fairbridge and with the lost-in-a-maze Least Lass. The case of Fairbridge and Least Lass was comical with the sort of cloud-high comedy that is found on World Abounding. There was everything ludicrous about it. There was a poignancy and a real agony about it also, but the betting was that these qualities would give way. You drive the sharp poignancy staff into the ground of World Abounding, and it will grow green leaves on it before you can blink; yes, and grotesque blooms like monkey-faces. But it won't lose any of its sharpness when it blooms.

Fairbridge Exendine was a rough-featured man, in no way handsome. He missed being clumsy only by the overriding power of his movements. He had always been a singling. He could hardly be called a woman-hater, since he was infinitely courteous and respecting to women, but he must be set down as a woman-avoider. Either he had been burned badly once, or the singling nature was in his roots and bones.

He was an abrupt man with a harsh sound to him. There was seldom, in themselves, anything harsh about his acts or his words; the harshness was in the shell of him, in the rind that wrapped him up.

And Least Lass Brindlesby?—Fairbridge believed that she wasn't real; and she was. She had been the most beautiful child that anyone had ever seen for no more than an hour or two, until the birth of the children Kora and Heros those twenty-four days ago. She was still of almost perfect beauty; she could only be faulted for a certain heartiness

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bursting out, too big to be contained in the beauty. She wasn't really the Least Lass any more; she was as large as her mother; she was bigger than either Kora or Heros. She had a shapeliness and grace superior even to that of her mother, for she was born on World Abounding.

But she looked like Fairbridge Exendine, for all her elegant beauty and for all his craggy ugliness. She looked like him as a daughter will look like a father, as a wife may sometimes come to look like a husband. She had "grown towards him," in the World Abounding phrase, and all such growths here had to be very swift.

She had a great deal of humor, this girl Least Lass, and she needed it. She was not of flimsy growth; none of the children (children no longer) were. On some worlds and quasi-worlds of rapid growth, there is a defect of quality. The quick-grown tree-sized things will really be no more than giant weeds; the quick-grown creatures will not have much to them. On World Abounding that wasn't so. The quick-grown plants and creatures here were fine-grained and intricate and complete. The persons were so, and especially Least Lass.

She was no weed. Weeds have no humor (except the Aphthonia Sneezeweed, of course). But Least Lass sometimes pursued Fairbridge with a humor that would make one shiver.

"My good man holds me in horror," she'd say. "He likes me really, but he believes that I am unnatural, and he has a real horror for the unnatural. Oh, I will turn him ashy-gray and I will turn him fruit-purple! I will turn him swollen blood-black. I'll give him all the seven horrors, and I love him. Fairbridge, Fairbridge, even the rocks are laughing at your horror and your plight, and mine is the rockiest laugh of them all."

Ah, the rocks laughed like clattering hyenas at the poor distraught man.

Least Lass cried a little sometimes though. There is a quick gushiness about tears on World Abounding, a voluminousness that would drown the world if continued more than a short instant. She cried a cupful there one day, actually filled a big blue-crystal cup with her tears. Then, in swift change of mood, she set it at Fairbridge's place at the dinner. And when he, puzzled, tasted it and sputtered, the composite laughter of all assembled near slaughtered his spirit. (Tears on World Abundant are quite pungent, more than just salty.)

Fairbridge Exendine did a strange thing then. He covered the cup with a napkin, then wrapped it in a towel, and carried it away to his singling quarters to preserve it just as it was.

Then Least Lass cried at least another cupful on the ground. But that was only a matter of seconds. She was always the sunniest girl ever, immediately after tears.

Things wound themselves up in the thirty-first day of the expedition

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on World Abounding. It was a clear and exuberant day. Both the Grian Sun and the Alpha Sun could be seen like bright stars in the daylight sky. This is always a good sign. And the Beta Sun itself was pleasantly scorching. A good strong day.

We cannot know just how it happened. The fields themselves announced that there was a special and privileged rutting time, not for all, only for a select two. The sands squeaked estrus sounds. Kora had talked to the Volcano and to the one-of-a-kind subcreature called Marrying Sam, and she had learned that the ceremony itself had been a rather stilted one. There was something of very deep emotion cloaked over with layers of rock-hard reserve, world-deep passion covered with a careful crust. The Volcano was familiar with such things in his own person, and explained that such surface covering is often necessary to very deep people.

Then, somewhere on World Abounding, Fairbridge and Least Lass and the Planet itself had their private experience (an orgy, actually, but their privacy extends even to the selection of the word). They had their time of it, and it may have been a high old time. The others could admire from a distance, and from secondary evidence; but they had no direct evidence, only the planetary resonances and the ghostly reports.

When it was over with, the day and the night of it, when the whole double-Nation of those folks was together again, Fairbridge still had that look of horror (it would never leave him). But now it was only one element of many. It was one part of a look or a play more properly named The Comedy of Horror, and this was but a portion of a whole assembly of deep comedies–The Comedy of Soul Agony, the Comedy of Quick Growth (one new furrow in the Fairbridge face represented the almost pun that "quick" here means "alive", means it specially on World Abounding), the Comedies of World Ending, of Love Transcending, or Death and Deep Burial.

Fairbridge hadn't been loosed of any of his own agonies, but at least he had learned that they were funny.

And Least Lass had a look of almost total happiness, it being understood that almost-total-happiness is often a shaggy clown-looking thing, with at least a slight touch of insanity, and a more than slight touch of death's-head. Quite a gay girl she was and would always be; she had been born knowing that death is open at both ends.

The end of the world, the end of a discrete culture comes quickly. Lisetta Kirwin worried about a certain impossibility here.

(Four children had been born on the same day; then, two days later, a fifth. That made eight persons of the one half-nation, the World Abounding Nation; and, of course, there were still the seven persons of the World-Gaea Nation.)

"We have been here for just thirty-six days," Lisetta worried,

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"and we have more than doubled our population. What if there should be (what is the phrase they used back in the Era of Wonderful Nonsense?) a People Explosion?"

"You know that is impossible, Mother," Kora said. "World Abounding sets its own lines, as is the habit of worlds."

"Yes, it is quite impossible, Grandmother," Chara Planda, the newborn daughter of Kora, said. "This is all there will be for this particular world. I myself, and those of my generation, will not experience it all directly. We will experience part of it by sharing. Our present numbers are our final numbers. It is less than some worlds have, I know, so we must make up for it by being as vital as we can be."

"But, in another twenty days or so," Lisetta protested, "there will be another passion period, and then—"

"No, there will not be," Kora tried to explain. "To do a thing more than once, to do a thing more than twice (twice is sometimes necessary when there is an intersection of two worlds), that is to become repetitious, and to be repetitious is the unforgivable sin. Touch stone, Mother, kick sand, knock wood (as you report it is said on Gaea), and pray that it may never happen to any of us."

"But of course it will happen, children, and it will become an increasingly compounded happening. Consider how many there will be in even one year—"

"A year!" Chara shrilled from the arms of Kora her mother. "Has anyone ever lived for a year?"

"I don't know," Kora puzzled. "Has anyone? Have you, Mother?"

"Yes, I'm afraid that I have," Lisetta admitted. But why should she be apologetic at having lived more than one year?

"I had no idea, Mother," Kora mumbled in half embarrassment. "I guess this is the reason for the gaps in our communication, however hard we try to close them."

Then, for a long while (by local standards), it was all an easygoing time on World Abounding. It was a period of action-packed leisure, though (not all will be able to understand this); it was crammed full of events, the outcomings and incomings or a new, maturing, fruitful culture. There was not room in the concentrated leisured hours of any of them to experience it all directly; each one must simultaneously live in the mind and body of everyone to be able to contain it all. There was the unhurried rapidity of thought and act and enjoyment. There was little difference in the day and night hours: sleep and wakefulness were merged; dreaming and experience were intermingled. The fulfilled persons would sometimes sleep while walking or even running, especially those of the full World Abounding generations.

"Are we awake or sleeping?" Least Lass asked her lover one day, or night.

"That I do not know," Fairbridge

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said, or thought, in whatever state he was in. "But we are together. May the Planet Plucker grant that we be always together."

"We are together," Least Lass agreed, "and yet I am climbing and leaping on the north ridges of the Volcano Misericors, and I am sound asleep. And you are swimming in the estuary of the River Festinatio, very deep below the surface where it is ocean water below the running water, and you also are asleep. Give me your hand. There! On a false level of reality it might seem that my hand had closed on the meaty bloom of a rock crocus, but that rock crocus is a part of yourself. It might seem, to an observer of no understanding, that your own hand has closed on an Aphthonia Blue-Fish (the Blue-Fish himself is such an observer and he believes this), but that Blue-Fish is really myself with the scales still on his eyes and on his whole fishiness. But the scales have fallen from our own eyes a little bit so that we may see reality. Grip my hand very hard."

They gripped hands very hard. They were together.

Ceramic flutes! The flutes were one signature of the present World Abounding culture. They have a tone of their own that cannot be touched by either wooden or brass horns. This light, hard, airy ceramic is made from the deposits of wind-blown loess from the ocher hills, from the limy mud of the plashes of the River Festinatio, from the ash and the pumice of the Volcano Misericors. This makes a ceramic like no other; there will always be old tunes nesting in every horn and pipe of it.

There were also green-wood clarinets with tendrils still growing on them; aeolian stringed-boxes that played themselves in harmonic to whistling; snake-skin drums; hammered electrum trumpets (what a rich sound they had!); and honey-wood violins.

Such orchestration as was employed was of a natural sort. Usually it was the whistling conies (who are very early risers) who would set the aeolian strings to going; then the several nations of birds would begin to intone; the people, whether waking or sleeping, would soon come in with their composite solos. Or sometimes it was one of the persons who began a musicale.

"Think a tune, Father," Heros Planda might call. And his father Rushmore, afternoon-dreaming somewhere in the blue-stem hills, would think of one. Heros would begin to blow a few notes of it, though he might be several kilometers distant from his father. It might be taken up then by boom-birds or by surfacing river fish with their quick sounding that was between a whistle and a bark. There was a lot of music in this World Abounding culture, but it was never formal and never forced.

There was a sculpture culture, though Fairbridge warned that it was a dangerous thing. World Abounding was so plastic a place, he said, that one might create more than he had

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intended by the most simple shaping or free-cutting. "Half the things alive here have no business being alive," he said. "One is not to trust the stones, especially not trust any stones of the Volcano."

Nevertheless, the sculpture culture, done in high and low relief, or in the free or the round, was mostly on the south face of that trustless volcano. Whenever the Volcano exuded a new flow-wall during the night, all the people would be at the bright and soft surface in the morning before it had cooled. These flow-walls were of mingled colors, of bright jagged colors sometimes, or soft colors at other times, then again of shouting colors; it was a very varied and chemical Volcano and it bled like rock rainbows.

Usually the Volcano himself set the motif for a sculpture-mass. He could do good and powerful work in the rough. He could form out large intimations of creatures and people and events. But he was like a genius artist who had only stubs, no hands. It was the human persons who had to do all the fine and finishing work of the almost-living murals.

The performed dramas of this culture fell into a half dozen cycles. They were mostly variations or continuations of things done by groups of the dead Terrace peoples, or by primordials before them. They were always part of an endless continuity. Here they might be in scene five of act four hundred of one of the Volcano cycles. Earlier acts had been performed by earlier peoples, by the primordials, by Aphthonian bears, by characters or manifestations which had had no life of their own outside of the dramas.

Poetry wasn't a separate act here. The people of World Abounding *were* poetry, they lived poetry, they ate poetry; they drank it out of cups. All the persons were in rhyme with each other; so they had no need of the sound of it.

Eating was an art. No two meals on World Abounding had ever been the same. Every one of them was a banquet, beyond duplication, beyond imitation.

So it went on for a long while (by local standards); it went along for near three standard months. The persons of the native World Abounding generations now appeared all to be about the same age, this in spite of the fact that some of them were parents of others of them.

"We have done absolutely everything," Chara Planda said one day. "Some of us, or others of us, or all of us have done everything. Now we will wind it up wonderfully. Is it not a stunning thing to have done everything?"

"But you haven't done everything, you bumptious child," Lisetta told her. "You haven't borne children, as your mother has, as myself your grandmother has."

"But I have. I have borne myself, I have borne my mother Kora, I have borne you my grandmother Lisetta, I have borne every person ever birthed on World Abounding or elsewhere.

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What we do not do as individuals, we do in common. All of our nation has now done everything, as I have. So we will wind it up."

All eight of the gilded youths of the World Abounding Nation came at the same time to the realization that they had done everything. They called it back and forth, they echoed the information from the blue-stem hills to the orchards to the mountains. They all came together full of the information. They assembled on the top of the Terraces. They sat down at table there, and demanded that the elder World-Gaea Nation should serve them.

"Outdo yourselves!" Least Lass Exendine called to all those elders. "Give us a banquet better than any you ever invented before. But you may not share it with us. It is for ourselves only. Serve us. And eat ashes yourselves."

So the oldsters, those who had not been born on World Abounding, served the assembled younglings, and did it with delight. There seemed to be a wonderful windup fermenting for all of them.

The Comedy of Horror, perhaps, showed a little stronger than it had recently on the face and form of Fairbridge, but it was still only one of that complex of deep comedies. Fairbridge had a very stark and terrible intuition now. He had a horrifying premonition of the real substance of those twin Comedies of World Ending and of Love Transcending. But even horror is a subject of comedy on World Abounding, and it is supposed to have that jagged edge to it.

"Bring all our things, bring all our artifacts," Chara ordered when they were still deep in the wining and dining. "Bring all our instruments and robes and plaques and free sculptures. Pile up enough food for a dozen banquets. Bring our green shroud-robes."

"It may be that you have not really done everything," Fairbridge said once in white agony while all the things were being piled up. "Let us think if there is not something left that you haven't done."

"No, no, good father, good husband, good lover, good ancestor, good descendant, good Fairbridge mine," Least Lass was saying, "we have done everything. We have done everything that could be in your mind, for plumbing the Fairbridge mind to its total depth is one of the many things we have done. And if there is something that we really have not done, then we will do it after we are dead. We do all sorts of communicating things in our sleep. Well, we will also do them in our deaths, as do the other dead people living in the Terraces. Fairbridge, my passion, my patsy, my toy, my love, go tell the Volcano that it is time."

"How should I talk to a Volcano?" Fairbridge asked.

"Why, you will speak to it directly, Fairbridge. Is it not a Gaea proverb that a man may talk to a volcano just as a beggar may talk to a horse or a cat to a king?"

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"And I should say *what* to the Volcano?"

"Simply tell him that it is time."

Fairbridge Exendine climbed up from the Terraces onto the steep eastern slope of the Volcano Misericors. He climbed clear to the cone. The cone was a ragged laughing mouth; the whole face was a distorted laugh. One eye of that face was far down the north slope, and the other eye was over in the blue-stem hills. The ears were sundered off somewhere; the brow was exploded; the jaw was shattered all over the scree slopes. It was a fine merry face that the Volcano had, even though it was a little disjointed and disparate.

Something overly glandular about this Volcano, though. Ah, it was great-glanded. The Gorgos gland that supplied all of World Abounding was a part of this Volcano.

"Are you sure that it is as funny as all that?" Fairbridge gruffed at this open-mawed mountain. "It strains my idea of the comic a little. It could stand some revision."

They were both silent for a little while.

"Ah, the young persons told me to tell you that it is time," Fairbridge said glumly. The Volcano belched a bit of fire. There was something of cruel laughter in that sound: a snort, really. Fairbridge suspected that the Volcano was more animal than man.

Then the Volcano became somewhat raucous, foul-mouthed ("That quip is my own, my last," Fairbridge said in his throat), rumbling and roaring, smoky and sulphurous, scorching, sooty. Fairbridge left it in his own passion.

He came down towards the shouldering Terraces again. All the World-Gaea people were calling him to come to the plain below where the hovercraft was at the ready. He ignored them. He continued to the high Terraces and to the native generations of World Abounding. It was like hot snakes hissing at his heels as he went, pouring streams of lava. The air had become like a furnace, like a forge with bellows puffing.

The River Festinatio had become quite excited. It palpitated in running shivers of waves. It was a-leap with all its fishy fauna, with all its bold turtles and squids. The Volcano always invaded the River at the climax of its eruptions: each successive Terrace ran further into the River. Nobody should have been surprised at the excitement of the River, nobody who had watched or taken part in the dramas of the Volcano cycles.

Fairbridge came down to the death-edge young people on the Terraces.

"You must not be here with us," Heros told him. "There is no way that you can earn that right. We are completed, but you are not."

Fairbridge threw himself down on the Terraces, however, and the ground of the Terraces had already begun to smoke.

"You cannot stay here, my other

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love, my other life," Least Lass told him. But he lay at her feet. He embraced her ankles.

"Shall we allow them to stay on the Terraces and be burned to death and buried with ashes?" Judy Brindlesby asked uneasily on the land below.

"Yes. We must allow it," Hilary said.

"But there is a whole world that will not be covered. Only the Terraces will be covered and burned."

"Yes."

"They sit there eating and drinking, and already we can smell the scorched flesh of their feet. They are all so young, and they could live so long and so happy anywhere else on the world."

"We don't know that they could live any longer. We don't understand it."

"But they are our children."

"Yes."

"Shall I feed you scraps from the table as though you were a dog at my feet?" Least Lass asked Fairbridge. "Go at once now. You have no business dying here. Go with them. They come in great danger and pain to themselves to get you."

Rushmore Planda and Blase Kirwin came and dragged Fairbridge off the top of the smoking Terraces and down the slopes where lava and ash flows ran like lizards. All were burned, and Fairbridge was dangerously burned.

They went into the hovercraft, the seven persons who had not been born on World Abounding. They rose into the smoky volcanic air and they hovered.

The young people, the World Abounding people, still sat and wined and dined themselves on the scorched Terraces. The hot ash and the fiery liquid shoved in upon them and rose to engulf them. They were encapsuled and preserved in the caking hot ash. Least Lass, at the rivermost edge of the Terraces, was the last of them to be completely covered. She made a happy signal to them in the hovercraft, and her mother Judy signaled back.

Hot ash filled the banquet plate of Least Lass by then, and hot lava filled her cup. Smiling and easy, she ate and drank the living coals to her pleasant death. Then she had disappeared completely under the flow of it, as the rest of them had done.

The Volcano covered them with another two meters of fill. Then he pushed on to have his will with the river.

"It did not happen, it could not have happened, it must not be allowed to have happened," Fairbridge Exendine was mumbling inanely, but Fairbridge was a mind out of body now. His mind was at the feet of Least Lass in the merciful ashes of the new topmost Terrace.

"The report will be a difficult one," Hilary hazarded. "Just how are we to explain that a normal human

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settlement is impossible here? How explain that it will always end in such swift short generations? How explain that every World Abounding culture is, by its nature, a terminal culture?"

"Why bother?" asked Erma Planda of the still golden body and emerald eyes. "We will make the entry that several of the other expeditions have made. Yes, and we will be classed as such disgraceful failures as they have been. What else to do?"

She wrote the damning entry quickly.

"We were warned that there would be some necks wrung if that phrase was used in our report," Rushmore said sourly.

"Wring my neck who can," Erma challenged. "There. It's done. And they really wouldn't have believed it, you know."

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This month's cover by Mel Hunter is available. It is the seventh and last in a new series of robot covers done especially for F&SF (the previous six were the January, May, September and December 1970 and the March and October 1971 issues; all are available.

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The complex problem of invasion of privacy resulting from the gathering and storage of data about individuals has yet to be resolved. It is argued that even democratic governments need accurate information about its citizens, so as to take action for their welfare. For example, it is said that the depression of the thirties might have been prevented if the government had sufficient information and had taken corrective action. So then, why not sacrifice a bit of "privacy," which is rather an old fashioned notion; after all, it's for our own good. . .

Accuracy

by JOHN MORRESSY

HE MADE AN AWKWARD ATtempt to sidestep, but the lobby was crowded, and he could not help but jostle the oncoming gentleman with the briefcase. He left the building by a side exit, stepped into an alcove in the facade, and opened the wallet. It was a lucky haul.

He checked the identity card and found that this time he was to be Henry Coleman. A good name: commoner than the last two and less likely to draw attention. He reflected, with a mirthless smile, that circumstances were turning him into a connoisseur of names. DEMCON persistence had made it inadvisable to retain any name for more than a day.

He thumbed through the contents of the wallet, committing to memory the essential data that gave form and official substance to his identity. Nearly a score of numbers, names, and facts had to be memorized on the spot, but long practice had made the task easy for him. Another of my special talents, he thought, along with picking pockets and keeping quiet. And running.

Spotting likely victims was another valuable talent he had developed. Henry Coleman had nearly seven hundred dollars in his possession, plus a B-level State Credit Plate that would be good for another five thousand if he moved fast, before word of the theft could be circulated.

Getting that money was the most important thing right now. Coleman —with the cards in his possession and the data memorized, he felt that he *was* Coleman—transferred the essential documents, discarded the incriminating wallet, and headed for the nearest State Credit Office, three blocks away.

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He walked briskly. State Credit Offices closed at five sharp, and he wanted to visit more than one this afternoon. B-level plates were uncommon, and he meant to make the most of this one. He turned the corner walking too fast to backtrack and found himself facing a pair of armed DEMCON guards. He had walked into a mobile checkpoint. There were too many to overpower; it was too late to turn and run, too soon to offer a bribe; nothing to do but play along and hope this was merely a routine spot check.

"All right, you. On line. Get over there, quick," one of the guards growled, nudging him with his gas gun.

Coleman stepped obediently to the end of the line. Only three people were ahead of him. Barring trouble, he would still make it to two State Credit Offices before five.

The matronly woman at the head of the line was dismissed after a cursory check of her papers. The girl behind her was younger, only twenty or so, and quite attractive. She appeared nervous. After close questioning, the senior verifier ordered that she be detained. He had her taken to the van that stood by the curb, then took his place at the table, and snapped his fingers at the man in front of Coleman.

"Come on, you. Stop gawking. Let's have your papers," he said.

"Yes, sir. Right here, sir."

"Let's hear it," the verifier said.

"Yes, sir. I'm Edward Genuit, G41-70035-E611828-90403."

The verifier looked up suspiciously. "Let me see you walk, Genuit. Go on, over to the van and back."

The man walked slowly to the curb and back to the table, trying unsuccessfully to conceal a slight limp. The verifier smiled up at him coldly. "You're in trouble, Genuit, you know that?"

"I fell last night and hurt my ankle. I thought it would go away by morning."

"But it didn't."

"I... I know. I was going to report to the Interim Data Station this afternoon. I planned to appear and have it entered."

"You should have gone this morning. It's too late now."

"Sir, I'll do whatever you require. Anything you say. I've never broken the law."

The verifier held up Genuit's identity card. "There's nothing on here about an accident or a limp. That means you're carrying false credentials."

"I meant to report it, sir. If there's anything I can do, I'm willing.... Anything you say."

"Maybe I'll do a little checking after I finish here. You wait over in the van. Guard, take this man," the verifier called. As the guard took Genuit aside, the verifier stretched out his hand for Coleman's papers.

"Name?"

"Henry Coleman, C73-24798-H36 5143-72866."

The verifier emptied the contents of Coleman's wallet on the small portable table and sorted through

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them. He picked up one card, then a second, turning them over slowly, scrutinizing them in silence.

"Where are you coming from, Coleman?" he asked abruptly.

"My office. Constitution Plaza Tower, Suite 7706."

"Where are you going?"

"The State Credit Office."

"Oh." The verifier nodded knowingly. "Business isn't so good, eh? Or are you making a deposit?"

"I wish I could," Coleman said gloomily. "Business has been off since the latest round of peace talks broke down."

"Those peace talks are more trouble than they're worth. We ought to go in there and finish it off, once and for all," the verifier said. The guards, looking on, nodded their assent. He returned his attention to the cards spread out before him. "You're carrying a B-level plate. That's good. A man with that kind of rating usually knows how to talk sense."

Coleman shrugged noncommittally, waiting for the verifier to name his figure.

"I run into some of the damnedest people on these checks. You wouldn't believe it, Coleman. I had one this morning, a businessman, guy like yourself," the verifier went on, in the manner of a man exchanging confidences with a sympathetic acquaintance. "You'd expect a man like that to know something about the world. Well, not this one. He was so stupid he was practically insulting. He tried to bribe us, right out in the open. 'Here's fifty dollars for you boys,' he says. Fifty dollars to divide among the whole team. Imagine that, Coleman."

Coleman looked perturbed. "That's pretty bad. I've never bribed anyone in my life, but. . .well, even though business is off, I'd never offer less than a hundred."

"That's not much of an improvement. You see, we're not looking for a bribe. We don't operate that way. We're collecting for the memorial fund, and it's pretty low. Two hundred dollars would be a nice contribution."

"That's a lot of money. I was serious about business being off lately. I've had cancellations—"

"I'm serious about the two hundred," the verifier said flatly. "Don't be stingy, Coleman. You don't want to be taken in for questioning, do you? A busy man like you can't afford to spend a month or two in interrogation centers. It would cost you a hell of a lot more than two hundred by the time you got out. And if the questioning turned up anything. . . ." He shrugged his shoulders and dangled the credit plate before him.

"I'd like to contribute two hundred dollars to the memorial fund," Coleman said quietly.

"I knew you'd want to help out, Mr. Coleman," the verifier said, scooping the cards and money off the table and replacing them carefully in the wallet, handing it back to him. "It's only sensible."

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Coleman nodded. He took two bills from the wallet and passed them to the verifier, who slipped them into his tunic and gestured to the guard. The guard stepped aside, grinning, and allowed Coleman to pass.

He walked on quickly, breathing deep to calm the murderous rage these encounters always roused in him. He could not afford to show his feelings. Anger had to be controlled in these times, buried under smiles and a show of respect. An ordinary citizen was helpless against the power of DEMCON. If a verifier accused any man of interfering with the count, the man was summarily punished. Trial was considered unnecessary in dealing with offenses against the count.

Peace, prosperity, the happiness of the citizenry, the very future of the nation all depended on total cooperation in maintaining a constantly accurate population count and keeping the data banks up to date. Every schoolboy learned that, as he learned the proverb, "Accuracy is security, error is danger, deception is treason." And so the Department of Demographic Concerns ran the country, and five hundred million frightened numbers cringed before them, submitting to the semiannual census, monthly reports to the Interim Data Stations, compulsory spying on neighbors and relatives, and the swaggering, venal brutality of the verifiers. And why? Coleman asked himself again, confronting the treasonous question that no one dared ask openly and few allowed themselves to think on. Why the count, hovering over everyone and everything? There was no peace and a false prosperity; life was a daily humiliation for much of the populace, a living hell for some; the future of the nation belonged to DEMCON, not to the people. A single man could not hope to defeat them; he could only outrun them. That cost money, far more money than an unregistered, illegally trained fugitive from DEMCON justice could acquire honestly. Coleman had found another way. In a society of criminals, he became a criminal.

Fellner looked down on the bald crown of the man behind the desk, watching the thin glaze of perspiration that glowed under the ceiling light. The Bureau Chief of Area 3 liked his office warm. Too warm. Fellner became uncomfortably aware of the tacky dampness under his arms, the undershirt sticking to his muscular body. He shifted his weight, moistened his lips, and sighed. The chief looked up from the papers he was studying.

"Getting impatient, Fellner?"

"No, Chief. Just a little warm. It's warm in here."

"I'm comfortable, Fellner."

The chief resumed his reading. Fellner gulped back a sudden flutter of nervousness in his stomach. He disliked his work here at DEMCON, disliked even more the man he worked under. He wanted nothing more than to do his work quietly and anonymously until something

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opened up in the planning branch. But this matter was too important to pass over. A discrepancy in DEM-CON figures was serious. The chief had to be told, even though his reaction was sure to be anger closely followed by accusation.

The chief leaned back in his chair, pushing the papers aside impatiently. He wiped his forehead and crown daintily with a white handkerchief. Fellner waited for him to speak, and the chief took his time.

"All right, Fellner, what's this all about? You come in here with thirty sheets of figures that don't tally. I can look them over and see that. Now, what's it supposed to mean?"

"I've discovered a discrepancy in the Norsec tallies, Chief."

"Is that right, Fellner? The computers made a mistake, but you caught it. How long have you been here?"

"Two months, Chief."

"Two months, and you're an expert," the chief said. He shook his head condescendingly. "Well, go ahead. Let's hear your story."

"We were doing the routine check on the Northern Sector as part of the standard census prelim, and we kept turning up a single-unit discrepancy. I verified all data and reran all findings, and the discrepancy came up exactly as before."

"Did you check back?"

Fellner nodded. "I took it back as far as the beginning of the semiannual census program. It turned up in eleven different subsectors, and I could find no pattern. I tried a second and a third rerun, and it showed each time. It's a single-unit variable discrepancy, and that's something that hasn't happened since the bureau started using the sensory scanners."

"I know, I know. What do you mean, no pattern?"

"He seems to be—"

"He?" the chief interrupted.

"The unit of discrepancy," Fellner corrected himself. "It appears in every tally since the bureau first used the scanners, but it keeps moving from sector to sector, almost as if it's running. I think—."

"Wait a minute before you start thinking, Fellner," the chief broke in. "That's my job, and I want some more information before I start thinking. I want you to do some close checking. You're young, Fellner, and you haven't been with the Bureau very long. You're ready to jump to the conclusion that there's a unit out there that's never been counted. Now, that's damned near impossible. Not absolutely impossible, I admit, but close to it." He rose and began to pace the room. Fellner recognized the sign of nervousness. "Our job is to keep tabs on the population, and we do it. And the people know it, Fellner. They know what we expect of them, and they know the penalties for non-cooperation. Nobody's tried to fool us for a long time. If the machines come up with a discrepancy, the chances are a million to one they've been fed bad data or they're malfunctioning."

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"I've double-checked all data and had every machine gone over by the tech staff, Chief."

"Findings?"

"Data accurate, machines functioning properly."

The chief stopped his pacing. He wiped his forehead and crown once again; then he sat down and spoke crisply to Fellner. "Check again. If they come out clean this time, begin a total data rerun and correlation at once."

"That's going to tie up a lot of computer time, Chief. First runs on the next semi start in two weeks, and—"

"Do it, Fellner."

"Right. If you say so."

"I say so. I want you to restrict banks B, C, and F to this job. The others can handle all the semi data. And do it quietly. As of this minute, it's a confidential project, and you're in charge. I'll replace the other technicians with topsecs for this project."

"Is that absolutely necessary, Chief? It will take time to brief new men."

"Fellner, if the data is correct and the machines aren't malfunctioning, then at the very least we've missed a unit on the last five semis," the chief said, slowly and patiently. "Do you know what that means? If you want to do some thinking, think about *that*. It means we're not doing our job the way we should. And we have to find out why, and find it out fast. This discrepancy might be a plant to test our security and our follow-up procedures. There are people in the administration who don't like DEMCON. They're afraid of us. They think we know too much and have too much power, and they'd like to see us hamstrung. A running error in population statistics would make us look bad and give them something to use against us at appropriations time. You don't want to see DEMCON cut back, do you, Fellner?"

"No, Chief. Of course not."

"Then do this job and do it right. I want a total correlation in reverse chronological order. Key it to unauthorized relocation."

"How far back shall I go?"

"Take it to 1997. Before that we can't assume absolute accuracy in our figures."

Fellner nodded. He was working out an approach already, thinking of half a dozen contingencies. This was an enormous undertaking. It could go on for months, and he would be in full charge, reporting directly to the chief. He felt the uneasiness in his stomach once more. The chief went on, issuing curt orders.

"All technicians on banks B, C, and F are reassigned to my staff. Tell them it's part of new prelim procedure. I'll keep them too busy to ask questions. The topsecs will be at your division in fifty minutes. They'll be briefed before they reach you. Get them to work as soon as they arrive. Check the data and the computers, and if they clear, then begin the correlation run immediately. Report to me in person. Put nothing in writing. Not a word about

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this project to anyone else in or out of DEMCON, understand?"

"Right, Chief."

"If there's somebody out there who's been evading our count, we'll find him. We'll find who he is and where he is, and we'll show him what we do to obstructionists. Don't slip up, Fellner." The chief handed him the papers and dismissed him.

Before Fellner was outside the office door, the chief was on the intercom to security for the topsec assistants. His voice was calm, but Fellner had caught the lapse into "he" and "him" in the chief's references to the mysterious unit. That was a sure sign of anger.

In his short time in Area 3, Fellner had learned one important fact about survival: the chief was a man with a single-minded dedication to success. He intended to be the top man in DEMCON one day, and he looked upon anyone and anything that called the accuracy of the count into question as a direct threat to his career. If there really is a discrepancy unit out there, Fellner thought, if some madman has managed to elude the scanners, the investigators, the random checkpoints, the plain-clothes spotters, and all the other apparatus that enabled DEMCON to keep minute-to-minute track of every facet of the lives of half a billion people, then God help him. He's upset the chief's plans. God help him, whoever he is. And God help me if we don't get him.

Now he was Joseph Richter.

He hurried down the dark tunnel, avoiding the alarms he himself had set. A concealed doorway opened on a narrow, winding, downward passage that led to a heavy door. Unlocking and opening the door was a long and intricate process, as was the relocking from within, but when it was done he was secure against anything short of a full-scale assault.

The woman and the infant were in the tiny sleeping alcove. His entrance awoke the child, and he began to cry lustily. Richter took him and soothed him, and gave him back to the woman. She was pretty, but very thin and pale.

"You're back sooner than you expected," she said. "Was there trouble?"

"Not a bit. This was the best trip ever. No checkpoints, so I was able to move fast. And I was lucky."

"Lucky?"

"The last wallet I took had an AA-level State Credit Plate. I got two hundred thousand on it. Do you know what that means?"

Her eyes widened and she drew the child close. "We can escape!"

"We'll be on our way tomorrow. I spoke with the evasion men, and they'll be ready. We're going out beyond the barrier." He sat beside her and took her in his arms. "There are other countries out there where they don't have the other count, and DEMCON, and all the things that have made this place a living hell on earth."

"But you know what they say about the other countries. They're all

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our enemies. Their people aren't free."

"I don't know what that word means any more. They tell us we're free," he said, rising and gesturing around the tiny chamber. "Free to live in an ancient fallout shelter because it's the only place the scanners can't pick us up. That's our freedom. You haven't been free to walk out in the sun and air for months, or have your baby at a real hospital. If we don't register our son with DEMCON before he's ninety days old, they can shoot us for treason. Could we be less free anywhere else?"

She shook her head reluctantly and looked down on the infant in her arms. "He's so little to make such a long trip. Only a month old. It will be hard enough for us—imagine what it will be like for him."

"He's healthy enough. Anyway, we have no choice." In a gentler voice, he assured her, "It won't be so bad. I've worked out two routes with the evasion men. You'll take the easy way, straight north, and cross the barrier within a week. I'll head west, into the Midsec mountain belt, and then cut north. I ought to join the two of you in less than a month from now."

"Will I have to travel without you?"

"You'll be with a team of evasion men. They'll take care of you."

"I want to stay with you. Why must we separate?"

"It's safer that way. We have a better chance of escaping."

He held back the information that the evasion men had given him, a vague but ominous rumor that had prompted his decision to leave at once. A special project was under way in Area 3. It was being run under top security precautions, but the word had leaked out that it concerned a recurrent single-unit discrepancy in the Norsec population count.

That was all the evasion men had been able to determine, but he knew what it meant. There was no time to waste. Once they knew of his existence, DEMCON would concentrate all their forces on finding him and eliminating him, and eventually they would succeed. That was inevitable. He had time to escape, if he moved quickly, but the danger grew with every moment he delayed. But while his existence was suspected, his wife and son were still unknown; if he traveled with them, he would be putting their lives in peril. He trusted the evasion men to care for them and bring them safely over the barrier. For their sake, he had to travel alone.

"Do you think we can really get away?" She sounded defeated, without hope.

"The evasion men told me that others have made it."

"What's it like beyond the barrier?"

"They don't know. They operate on this side and they never cross over. But they promised me that they'd find shelter for you on the other side, and have a woman stay

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with you until I come. They've never done this before, but they promised me they'd do it. Don't be afraid."

"I'm not afraid of going. I'm not even afraid of being with the evasion men," she said, struggling to find the words to say what she felt. "They can't be worse than the verifiers. The verifiers. . ." Her voice changed, becoming distant and flat. "If you hadn't stopped them. . .they would have. . . ."

"Don't think about that. It was a long time ago. We're going someplace where people don't do that to each other."

"I can't believe that there's any such place left on earth."

"There is," he said, sitting beside her, putting his arms around her and the child and drawing them to him. "There has to be. And we have to find it."

The chief looked thinner than he had a few weeks before, when the discrepancy had first been noticed. He perspired more freely now, and with some cause. The correlation had been in progress around the clock for two months, with no positive results. The discrepancy unit was an established fact, but its existence was still a mystery. It had not yet become a person, to be hunted, trapped, and destroyed.

"Fellner, it's impossible," the chief said. "There has to be some mistake in the data. Somebody's been tampering with the records to include false data. That's the only answer."

Fellner shook his head. "We've verified every bit of information in the banks by crosscheck. There's somebody out there who's totally unrecorded."

"That can't be. My God, Fellner, it's unnatural!" the chief cried, looking up with something like a superstitious awe in his eyes. "We know the name and current whereabouts of every man, woman, and child in this country. We know what they're doing, where they live, their education, their health, their income, their religion. . . . We know things about them that they don't know about themselves. More than wives know about their husbands, or parents about their own kids. A citizen comes on the records at the moment he's registered, and he never gets off. *Never.* There's the semiannual census, there are verification visits, interim reports, checkpoints. . .how can we have an unrecorded unit?"

Fellner shrugged his shoulders helplessly. "I don't know, chief, but it's the only answer. The data all checks out."

"Every birth has to be recorded. Everybody goes to school, and has a medical history. Everybody does his Voluntary Service hitch, gets his VecBee benefits, votes, pays taxes, uses State Credit. . . ." The chief rose, distraught, and began to pace the room. "There are hundreds of everyday activities that everybody performs, Fellner, and they're all under our scrutiny. Nobody can get through life without leaving his

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record in our banks. It's humanly impossible for that to happen in our society."

"But isn't it conceivable that one man, working alone, might be able to keep ahead of the census teams and the verifiers?"

"One man alone can't do anything any more, Fellner. Not in our system. First of all, his birth and early medical history would have to be unrecorded. He'd have to be educated outside the state school system. He'd have to maintain perfect health, avoid all group activities, evade our mobile verification teams, find a place to live. If he got that far, he'd have to escape his Voluntary Service hitch. And he'd still have to earn a living somehow, all his life. No, it's not possible." The chief fell into a morose silence. He paced the room twice, then slumped into his chair. He looked up at Fellner and laughed bitterly.

"What's the matter, Chief?"

"You don't remember the old days, when we started operating out of a two-room office in the Department of Human Resources. We grew fast. When it was proposed that we be made a spearate department, the domestic security boys tried to get their claws into us. They wanted a criminal anonymity law passed so they could claim jurisdiction over our verifiers. We argued that it was an impossible crime." He laughed again. "An impossible crime. And now someone's done it, and I'm going to look like a fool. Maybe we'll wind up with a DOMSEC investigation of the whole department. They'd love that."

Fellner nodded absently, his mind working on something the chief had said: even an unrecorded unit had to earn a living somehow. That was the place to look.

"Chief, I want to make two more correlation runs."

"On what data?"

"Petty crime and theft of identity materials."

"That's good, Fellner. That's good thinking," the chief said slowly. He sounded genuinely impressed, and for the first time in Fellner's experience, almost friendly.

An hour later, Fellner burst into the chief's office with a broad, triumphant grin across his face. The chief slammed down his telephone in midconversation and sprang up from his chair.

"Have you got him?" he cried.

"I've found a pattern that looks like the answer. If this unit is unrecorded, he can't make a legitimate living. He's almost forced to operate outside the law. Well, there's a trail of stolen wallets that corresponds exactly with the variations in his location. More than that—he steals to get identity cards, too; so he tries to steal from men who look enough like him for their cards to be useful. Not all the time, of course. He takes what he can get. But one type is bound to predominate, and that gives us a rough description: white male, light brown hair, blue eyes, slim build,

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between five-eight and six feet, probably in his twenties. He can't have any outstanding distinguishing characteristics, or one of our verification teams would have spotted him by now."

"Have you located him?" the chief asked anxiously.

"He's almost at the Norsec borderline, headed west. He's going straight for the Midsec mountain country, Chief. He's made a lot from his last thefts. He may plan to hole up for a while, and then he'll probably try to buy false papers. We can get him when he makes his move."

"We can't wait. We have to get him now, before DOMSEC gets wind of what we've been doing here."

"They're bound to find out anyway, aren't they? We'll have to turn him over to them when we get him. Aside from what he's done against DEMCON, he's a criminal."

"Who's a criminal, Fellner?" the chief smiled faintly and looked at Fellner with an expression of complete innocence. "Who are we talking about, anyway?"

"The discrepancy unit," Fellner said, puzzled.

"But he doesn't exist. There are no records of his existence in our banks. Nothing at all. You ought to know that. Apparently he's spent all his life trying to become nonexistent. Okay, then. If that's what he wants, I'm willing to oblige him."

"Kill him?" Fellner was suddenly afraid. The chief was in control again. His grudge would be settled his way.

"Don't put it that way, Fellner," the chief said, elegant distaste in his voice. "We're eliminating a discrepancy, that's all. Setting the records straight. Just doing our job."

There had been a close call, but it turned out well for him. The verifier had not expected him to be armed. Now his name was Garet, and he was traveling with the identity and equipment of a verification staff officer. They were on his trail and closing in fast, but this development would slow them. It would be a long time before they found the verifier's remains, and every hour brought him closer to the barrier and escape.

By nightfall he reached his destination deep in the Mid-States Sector mountain country. He pulled off the road and into the woods, and at once set up his signaling device. While he waited for the evasion man to appear, he changed his clothing and then stripped the sleek little pursuit car of all its weaponry, food concentrate, and medical supplies. He readied his weapons, ate, and settled down to rest until contact.

He woke with a start from a light sleep. The signaling device had flashed on. The contact was near.

A man slipped out of the trees and gave the sign. Garet responded. They lowered their weapons and the man joined Garet. He was young, but he showed the caution of an experienced evasion man.

"You must have done a good job back there," he said. "There's a small army after you, and they don't know

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where to look. They're sore as hell."

"One of them caught up with me. He didn't think I was armed. I came here in his pursuit car. It's over there."

In the bright moonlight, Garet caught the expression of amazement on the young man's face. He whistled softly. "No wonder they're so furious."

"He didn't give me much choice."

"They usually don't. The first thing to do is get rid of that car. There's a deep ravine about thirty yards back in the woods. We can push it down there. They'll never find it unless they walk into it. Then we head north, up a trail that runs almost all the way to the barrier. It's about five days' travel on foot."

Garet nodded. The young man went on.

"I have a message for you. The woman and the child are across the barrier and safe. You'll be given their whereabouts when we're across. That's all."

"Let's get started," Garet said.

For the next four days, their progress was steady and uneventful. On the third and fourth days it rained heavily. The rain slowed their advance and caused them considerable discomfort, but it eliminated the danger of aerial searchers. They encountered no signs of pursuit, and the evasion man was confident that DEMCON had completely lost track of them.

Over breakfast on the fifth morning, the evasion man briefed Garet on what lay ahead. Progress from this point would be slow and dangerous. About twenty miles south of the barrier, the minefields began. They were the first obstacles. Between the minefields and the prime barrier lay patrolled strips, electrified fields, concealed traps, flooded trenches, and other obstacles that even the evasion men were not sure of. There were ways around all of them, but one had to be careful. Sensory scanners were plentiful from here to the barrier, and patrols were frequent. Barrier patrols were hand-picked from Domestic Security Force veterans. They shot to kill.

"It sounds formidable," Garet said.

"It is. We've been about seventy-five percent successful so far, but they keep making it harder all the time."

"How do you manage to survive out here? They must hound you constantly."

"We manage. How did you last so long, right in the heart of Norsec? That's quite an accomplishment."

Garet gazed up into the brightening sky. "A lot of it was sheer luck. I was born at home, and my father never registered the birth. He was a doctor, and he treated me himself. I never had a medical record. He and my mother educated me." He looked at the evasion man and grinned. "By the time I was fifteen, I had read all the forbidden books. My father would have been barred from practice if they ever found out what he was doing. Nowadays, I guess he'd be executed."

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The evasion man nodded. "It's easy to be executed these days."

"One day my mother and father went out and didn't come back. I knew I was supposed to run if that ever happened, and I ran. I got away just before the verifiers came. I've been running ever since."

The evasion man stood and shook out his cup. "A little more, and then you can stop. Ready?"

They moved out, the evasion man in the lead. He carried a detection device to warn of scanners, and as they moved north, the scanners showed up in ever-increasing numbers. His attention became fixed on the detector; and when they rounded a bend and came face to face with a patrol, he was taken completely by surprise. The two groups nearly walked into one another.

Garet reacted immediately. Two of the troopers went down before the last one fired a shot. Garet got him, but it was too late. The evasion man was on his knees, clutching his stomach, a look of shock and astonishment on his young face.

Garet checked the patrol. They were all dead. He carried his guide into cover and propped him into a sitting position against a tree. The young man was badly wounded.

"Where do I go now?" Garet asked. "Can you hear me? Where do I go?"

The evasion man fumbled with his jacket. Garet reached inside and drew out a small, slender book. The evasion man nodded as Garet held it up before him.

"It's all in there," he said. "Hidden equipment. All known obstacles and evasion routes. Don't let them get it."

"I won't."

"Go. Hurry. I'll hold them off."

"I can't leave you here—"

"This is what you paid for. It's my job. Go. And good luck."

Garet nodded. He took the weapons from the fallen troopers and laid them by the evasion man. He dragged the bodies out of sight and then, without further talk he headed north. Half an hour later, far behind him, he heard a noise that sounded like gunfire.

That night, having slipped past a score of scanners, Garet came to the edge of the minefield. The first obstacle was cleverly laid out. Some three hundred yards ahead was the edge of a ploughed strip, with warning signs posted every fifty yards. But the actual minefield began a hundred yards before, in the low scrub growth bordering the ploughed strip. Garet checked the book and found a path marked out. In half an hour he was past the first obstacle.

The minefield meant that he was less than twenty miles from the barrier. He was tired, but he forced himself to move on all night, passing through thick woodland where he saw no patrols and no animal life.

There were traps, and he was forced to move with extreme caution. Thanks to the bright moonlight, he twice noticed trip wires in time to avoid them. He followed up the first one and found

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that it was triggered to release a barbed net. After that he moved more slowly, but steadily on to the north.

The water obstacle was not patrolled. Following the information in the evasion man's book, he located a cached rubber raft. As he drifted over the water, he looked down and saw the trip wires on the shallow bottom, the coils of barbed wire, the deep pits with the spiked sides. At the bottom of one pit lay a skeleton.

Past the water obstacle the open country began, and Garet had to hide out for the day and travel again by night. Fatigue and tension were taking their toll, blunting his alertness. He nearly blundered into the electrified field. It took him over an hour to find the tunnel passing underneath. The long struggle through the narrow airless tunnel in pitch darkness was a nightmare. He emerged exhausted and shaken, hungry and needing sleep, but day was near and he forced himself on. When it became too bright to travel, he climbed a thickly grown tree in the middle of a small clearing.

He awoke suddenly to the sound of voices coming near. Two troopers passed beneath his hiding place. One of them paused and leaned back against a tree. He removed his helmet, dropped it at his feet, and wiped sweat from his forehead.

"What's the hurry?" he asked his companion. "Relax a minute, will you? There's nobody in these woods."

"Yeah? Maybe that's what Helmer's patrol was saying when they got it."

"An evasion man did that. They got him. Relax, will you?"

"We got to keep on our toes, Cobey. Something's going on. They blew up the barrier in Norsec, and they may be looking to do the same here. They never did find the guy who killed that verifier."

"They will. What was that?" Cobey suddenly came alert, swinging his weapon around in front of him.

Garet cursed under his breath. At the mention of the Norsec barrier he had edged closer to hear more, and instead he had been overheard. He took the initiative.

He had a clear sight on the one called Cobey. He aimed and put a slug into his chest. Before Cobey went down, Garet dropped to the ground behind Cobey's partner and shot him in the midsection as he turned. He heard the noise behind him and spun around, firing as he turned, catching the last man of the patrol with his third burst, but not before he took one in the left arm.

The bullet passed through, missing bone, but the wound bled badly. Patrol troops used soft-nosed slugs that tore muscle and tissue to shreds. Garet ripped loose a trooper's first aid kit and patched the wound as best he could, but he felt his strength going. Only the thought that his wife and son had made it out of Norsec gave him determination. He could make it to the barrier. He had to make it now.

According to the evasion man's

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book, there remained only one more minefield, a two-mile-wide patrolled strip, and then the prime barrier. He was close. He felt his head swim with pain and weariness, and he longed to rest; but he knew that if he did not press on now, he would never make it. There would be time to rest on the other side, when they were together again. He collapsed twice before he reached the edge of the woods. He took a drink of water and all the antishock tablets from the first aid kit, and felt better. The minefield lay just ahead. He studied the ground on both sides, and saw no one. He decided to try the minefield now, while he still had strength, and then rest briefly on the other side.

He got through the scrub growth leading up to the minefield and began to work his way slowly across. He felt himself growing weak and dizzy, and sank to his knees, freezing in place until the dizziness passed. He started ahead and grew faint once more. He began to crawl. From far distant, faint but growing steadily louder, came the baying of dogs. Someone shouted behind him. A slug passed near his head, then another. He stood and began to run. Something slammed into his leg, and he fell and began to crawl again, blindly and desperately, not knowing where he was headed. He felt an instant of awful noise and pressure and terrible heat, then cold, and then it was over.

"All in all, we didn't come out of this badly, Fellner," the chief said. He seemed to be in a good humor, and Fellner was suspicious of this reaction. According to his information, the affair of the discrepancy unit had not come out well for anyone concerned.

"I'm glad to hear it, Chief. I haven't heard anything but rumors. They didn't sound good."

"Well, we did lose a verifier in the line of duty," the chief admitted, then brightening, "but DOMSEC lost two patrols, and they didn't even catch the man. He stepped on a mine."

"He got as far as the minefields, then?"

"He was only a few miles from prime barrier. If he hadn't stepped on that mine, he might have gone all the way. You almost have to admire him." The chief paused, then laughed expansively. "I'm grateful to him, I'll tell you that. He made DOMSEC look like a bunch of fools. We did our job according to the book. We located the discrepancy and pursued the unit. Once he got inside barrier territory, he was DOMSEC's problem, and they fell all over themselves."

"You'd think they'd be on their toes after that barrier breakthrough a few weeks ago."

The chief made a gesture of dismissal. "If you ask me, they're getting careless. Out of shape, you know? If the people ever found out how bad they are, the evasion men would have more business than they could handle. Well, it's DOMSEC's touch luck, and all their own fault. It

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ought to keep them off our backs for a long time."

"Let's hope so, Chief," Fellner said earnestly.

"I'm pretty sure it will. But I didn't bring you up here to pick DOMSEC apart. We've lost a member of the field staff, a fellow named Garet. He has to be replaced, and I've recommended you. It means an initial jump of two full grades, and promotions after that come a lot faster in the field. The work is dangerous, but you can handle it. A big strapping fellow like yourself shouldn't be playing nursemaid to a machine, anyway. Leave that to us old men."

"You're transferring me to the field staff?" Fellner asked, stunned by the news.

"Don't spread it around, Fellner, please. I passed over more than thirty men who have seniority over you, because I think you earned the chance. You did a good job on this whole project, and you kept your mouth shut. I like that. If you show as much sense in the field, you ought to be a bureau chief in five years."

As Fellner groped for words, the chief rose, smiling paternally, and shook his hand. "You don't have to thank me, Fellner. If you want to thank anybody, thank that unit you uncovered."

"I guess I should."

"They never found out who he was, you know. A totally unrecorded unit. Damned odd. They told me he had a smile on his face when they found the body. Both legs blown off, and he was *smiling!* He must have been a lunatic. What would a man like that have to smile about?"

Fellner shook his head confusedly, his mind too occupied with his own concerns to admit time for the chief's idle questions. He was in trouble, and he knew it. The chief's pleasantries were his way of covering over what amounted to a death sentence. Transfer to the field staff was the chief's customary way to get rid of someone who knew too much. Promotions came fast, it was true, but they did so because of the high mortality rate among field verifiers, prey to evasion men, escapees, and the lawless bands of migrants that roamed the empty stretches between urban centers. In five years Fellner might easily be a bureau chief, if he lived; but it was far more likely, almost a certainty, that he would be a dead man. And with him dead, the chief's mistakes would be buried. Before that could happen. . . .

A lone fugitive, using only the skimpy information available to evasion men, had made it to the outskirts of prime barrier. A field verifier could go farther. With careful planning, he might go all the way.

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A very compressed and dark and funny story about what happens when Network strikes at the roots of the contemporary terror.

Causation

by BARRY N. MALZBERG

GORMAN GOT THE IDEA TOward the end of July, not a moment too soon, as it turned out. Re-enactment, that was the ticket. Prescience, prefiguration, documentation, satire. . .all had failed. Obviously, then, there had to be another way.

"Look, then," he said to network, "we have got to come to grips with the contemporary terror. For too long we have been simply fiddling on the edges. Symptoms, intimations, the last twitches. . .mere consequences, if I tell you the truth. How can you get ratings on that, to say nothing of a true insight? What people want, of course, is the now of it."

The now of it. Network was impressed. Talked about the need for further study. Then asked Gorman to explain in detail, if he would.

He did so, which was network's final mistake, not that anything, in the long run, would have changed the situation anyway.

"Negroes," Gorman said excitedly (he was an excitable man whose condition was not in the least eased by the frigidity of his wife, the strange zoning situation in his community, and his subscription to the *Napalm Examiner,* a newsletter wholly devoted to pictographic and journalistic descriptions of the compound's effect). "Riots, demonstrations, bombers, beards, pickets, songs, protests, campuses, deans, police, marshals. Uniquely American phenomena, yes. But what's wrong with them? I ask you now, in all sincerity, to tell me this: what is wrong with them?"

Network was alert. "Symptoms," it said. "You told me that, yourself."

"Exactly!" said Gorman and trembled with joy. "But what's really underneath all of it? Think for a moment; reflect. What's charging them up, making these kids go, go, go? Answer me that one little question if you will, if you can."

"Haven't the faintest idea. After all, it isn't my function to *have* ideas,

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now is it? Unfair, of course, but we don't get to be where we are unless we're idiots. You're the gadget-man, the thinker. Spring. Or shoot."

"Sex, then," said Gorman, reaching a worn, graceful hand to his glossy eyes and rubbing them, pressing them gently into the skin. He knew he looked dramatic that way, to say nothing of highly credible. "Sex, that's it."

"Interesting," said network, "but you're just edging around, you're not putting it on the line. Sex, after all, is a common condition nowadays. But what—"

"I meant, sexual tension," Gorman cried; the idea was so beautiful and simple and true, all the more so because he had just realized it on the instant. "All these kids wanna get laid, you follow what I mean? But they can't get laid, not as much as they want to, because of social mores and repressions and all like that. So it spills out into the other areas. Follow?"

"But look," network said patiently. "That isn't a new problem, you dig? And, besides, according to our own research reports and National Sex Tests, they're getting more now than—"

"Nonsense," Gorman said briskly, doing some action with his glasses. "None of it is keeping pace with the population explosion, that's all. 5% of them are getting 95% of the sex. What about the others? Are they supposed to scrounge, read dirty books, practice *mens sano in corpore sano?* There's just too much, you understand; too much of it around for them to stay calm." He was babbling a little, an old tendency which he remembered his wife describing to him as one of the surest signs of latent homosexuality; the hell with her. "So they take to the streets. The war, you see; the war would have to be the public extension of their desires. It's the American dream over there, you get the picture? *Bang-gang, bang-bang.* zoom in and zoom out, drop a bomb a day to keep the specters away. And all that passivity, all that exploitation. You see their problem?" Gorman said, shaking his fist at network who blinked mildly, "what are they going to do? They can't approve it because of their own deprivation. And it's all so American that, for them, it can only be *un*American. They've got to *stop* it before the conflict set up makes them explode. So that's what they do," he finished, breathing heavily through his mouth, rubbing his palms. "They feel charged to stop it."

"Interesting," said network because there was nothing else to say. "But after all, this has been going on for centuries now; wars and so on. There have been other parallel situations without parallel results. Therefore—"

"Don't you see," Gorman said desperately, gathering that network was taking him for some sort of harmful nut, and that could only make trouble for him on the next paychecks, "don't you see the simple

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connections? The basic parallels never-before-duplicated? Villages, huddling places, this passivity, by God," he said enthusiastically, "it's an institutionalization of rape, that's all it is. But forget the politics," he added hastily, seeing network struggling in his seat, "just concentrate on the essentials. And the television That's important, too. That explains the whole thing."

"So gimme the idea already," network said. "I'm very tired and impatient, suddenly, and feeling this creeping feeling of dismay."

"Get below the tensions," Gorman said, winding up everything quickly now, make the sale or lose it but don't diddle-daddle around, that was the rule, "just throw on the screen this, uh, sexual intercourse, you see; a man and a woman doing it and after you, well, kind of ease them into it then you can start with couples and same sexes and groups. They'll have something real to *relate* to, don't you understand? There won't be all this god damned projectivity; it'll all be right on the level."

"Censors–" network said. Now he was back in his own area. "Censors will simply–"

"Hell with the censors," said Gorman, feeling himself transcend the situation at a swoop; *now* he had the bastards if all they were talking about was censors, already, "just bull right in and do it. Once it's on the screen it's fait accompli and you'll win an award or something."

"A public service award," said network.

And did it. Network did it. The hell with everything, apocalypse was coming, they might as well do it and they did. . .and on the fourth day After Sex, natural time, the country was bombed out of existence by a convoy of SAC bombers which, wheeling from their just destination with grim but holy purpose, tore the whole lousy, filthy, unprintable mess out of its portion of the earth. "Bunch of stinking commies," said the lead pilot before he very carefully, very inevitably, inserted a hand grenade, kept for just those anticipated purposes in the very rear of the cockpit, and exploded himself, to say nothing of the vehicle.

Coming next month. . .

Fine, offbeat tales from an old master, **Ray Bradbury**, and a newer one, **Harlan Ellison.** A previously unpublished story by **Anthony Boucher.** And, of course, much more. See page 143 for a unique chance to subscribe to the new, expanded F&SF at the old rates.

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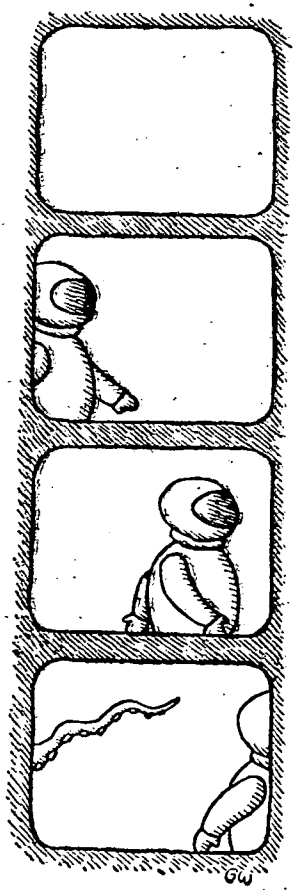
BAIRD SEARLES

FILMS



RICHARD MATHESON's *I Am Legend* has become a minor classic in the field, for reasons I personally have never been sure of, and has already been made into one film, titled *The Last Man on Earth* and starring Vincent Price, which is certainly one of the more watchable B flicks that turn up on the tube. Now there's a second version, with that Ben Hur of the Apes, Charlton Heston, and circuitously titled **The Omega Man** (Warner Brothers).

Given that I have not read the novel in some years, and the monumental changes the writers have made, I can but review the film as a new work. It goes something like this. . .

A Sino-Soviet border dispute has blown up into a full scale bacteriological war. All of mankind dies of the induced diseases except Neville (Heston), who survived because he was a military doctor who availed himself of an experimental serum that rendered him immune, and a group of victims in the tertiary stage of the disease who are ambulatory, but have become albino religious maniacs ultra-sensitive to light. Their religion consists of a determination to destroy all remnants of the past culture, particularly anything mechanical or technological. . .which, of course, includes Neville; because of his background, presumably, not his acting talents. They have the advantage of numbers, but are restricted because of their

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refusal to use guns or other mechanical killing devices, and because they can only move at night. The Family, as they call themselves, wear black monk's robes, and are led by a man called Mathias. All this takes place in, where else? Los Angeles.

Now the film gets off to a good start. The various dodges that the Hatfields and the lone McCoy use to get rid of each other are fun, and the shots of a deserted and corpse littered LA are stunning, even bettering the similar ones in *On the Beach.* But suddenly Relevance enters with a bang in the guise of a girl who is healthy, black and beautiful. She comes on like Bobby Seale in drag, with lines like "Up against the wall," but turns out to be a sort of den mother to a brood of children who are more or less immune. She and Neville shack up with much merry dialogue about if you were the only girl in the world, etc., while he tries to cure her brother who is entering the tertiary stage. Things get more complex and less logical from there, though I must admit I was never quite sure how it was going to end, which is always a plus factor. I won't spill it, but I will say that the final freeze frame may go down in history as the most vulgar of the 70s.

There are several reasons, I think, why the film went downhill from its promising beginning. The danger sequences seemed too easily set up, and even more easily resolved, with a gun or a flashlight. Heston is always a problem, with that profile that looks like a memorial to all those who fell in the Colosseum, and he *will* run around without a shirt on, as if he were back in the arena. At least here he doesn't take *all* his clothes off, one of the many horrors of *Planet of the Apes.* And the superficial relevance is terribly forced, though on a deeper level (if this film has a deeper level), it's oddly against its time, with Heston as heroic military and scientific technology opposed to anti-technological elements represented as insanely homicidal (though it was Heston's kind who brought on the whole mess, a point played down). That they are called The Family and are led by a charismatic madman is surely no coincidence, either. All in all, I wish the money and craft that went into this version had been devoted to a straight filming of the novel, despite my mixed feelings about it.

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Here is a good, strong piece of sf about a team of scientists in a near hopeless situation. Dropped off on a planet to research a supposedly primitive culture, they suddenly find themselves captives of a technologically advanced and vicious alien race.

The Sorrowful Host

by WILLIAM WALLING

GRIJE VAN POLDER TOPPED the trail summit panting with exertion, knees fluttery and weak from the effort of his thousand meter climb. He wiped his forehead and massaged a cramped calf, leaning back against a sharp-edged boulder to catch his breath while he scanned the tumbled massif of the escarpment that lay bleakly exposed in the late afternoon heat glaze.

Today, at least, no vicious little arrowhawks were wheeling above, waiting to plummet down on him through Nile's clear, oxygen-rich air; nor, more importantly, were any Corvu air patrols cruising along the scarp. Only the orange-white dazzle of Betelgeuse, nine short light-years distant, and the ruddy, westering ball of Nile's primary, Bethrapha, broke the smooth blue dome overhead.

He studied Betelgeuse. Much more of a spectacle when seen from space, of course, the supergiant swelled three hundred forty-seven million kilometers from limb to limb—Shoulder of the Giant indeed!—escorted by a pair of puny companions whose occlusions caused the monster to wax and wane in Nile's long, calm nights like some demon's baleful eye. Even now, Bethrapha's glare failed to subdue the great star's gemstone brilliance.

And two hundred-fifty weary light-years beyond the supergiant, he knew, floated green and golden Terra. Van Polder had long since abandoned thoughts of ever seeing Terra again.

He sighed and stirred, setting out stiffly along the high trail toward the weapons cache, thinking bleak thoughts about the Corvu deadfall that he and Floyd Ono, the Lalandian-Japanese expert in humanoid cultures, and Siridar Mashbravatan, the happy-go-lucky Hindu linguist from Sirius Five, had so blindly entered half a Bethraphan cycle before.

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Exeter had dropped their team off—a routine landing to follow up the cursory survey made by explorers two dozen objective cycles ago—they being merely one of twenty-odd xenology teams *Exeter* was carrying to destinations round and about mighty Betelgeuse. The pinnace's crew had shaken hands, wishing them well, wishing them luck with the Nilian abos, promising to have chilled champagne standing by to celebrate their retrieval two cycles hence. They'd watched the pinnace thunder up toward rendezvous with *Exeter*, tense and nervous at being once more in the field, but excited by prospects of researching a virgin culture.

Mashbravatan had broken the seals and unpacked the communcator, while he and Floyd worked at setting up the shelter hut. Mash had, in fact, been talking to *Exeter*, still in her groove up near the zenith, when shipboard alarms squalled in his headphones. Ashen-faced, Mash had cried, "My God, they've gone to battle stations!" just as the silent, unmistakable flash blossomed high above the lacy clouds of Nile. It had guttered, died. *Exeter* and the thousand imaginative talents aboard her, now an expanding sphere of radioactive gases, had died with it. And a bottomless gulf of almost sixteen parsecs separated them from the nearest Terran base.

They'd stared at one another, stunned and angry, mumbling stunned, angry absurdities, until Corvu aircars screamed in low over the trees. Only Floyd Ono, he remembered, had had presence of mind enough to scramble after the pellet rifles, flinging them into a heavy thicket. Tight-lipped and shaken, they'd watched the aircars land—turbine-driven aircars, where no advanced technology was supposed to exist!

Their first, sickening contact with the Corvu had left them battered and bleeding, in abject despair. Van Polder liked Mash's description best, he decided grimly as he plodded on. "Born of a rhinoceros, fathered by a tarantula," the linguist had drawled, kneading his lumps and bruises, "the Corvu are a marvelous example of what mother nature whelps after a long, painful constipation!"

Swinish, insufferably arrogant, the Corvu were like a pack of very intelligent, very ugly jackals. Jackals, he conceded ruefully in his mind, who held him and his companions safely in the palms of their horny butcher's hands!

Van Polder came abreast of the overhanging boulder he'd been watching for. He surveyed the trail in both directions, then cautiously bent and pushed through the scrub and in under the rock, groping for loose brush, which he pulled to one side. The pellet rifles were safe, still in their field cases, which were, in turn, wrapped in a weatherproof thickness of plylon.

He carefully replaced the brush, turning to come back to the trail.

Startled, the xenologist came erect, thumping his head painfully against overhanging granite. From

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the trail, the stooped figure of Gunga Din stood watching him in slack-jawed puzzlement.

Van Polder cursed under his breath, squelching the impulse to grab one of the rifles and blast the old Nilian's dim-witted head from his shoulders. Breathing heavily, wondering behind which boulder the beggar'd been crouching, he hunched back to stand beside the hangdog Nilian aborigine who had shadowed his footsteps ever since landing.

"I asked you to stay below," said Van Polder patiently.

"I . . .'fraid for Va'poler," suggested the forlorn Gunga Din, taking up his devoted struggle with basic Terran. "Save Va'poler fr-from. . ."

"Save Van Polder from what, Gunga Din? Arrowhawks?"

The Nilian raised his fire-sharpened throwing stick and spear, proudly fingering the flint knife slung in a neatly tied thong looped around his scrawny neck. He wore a reeking, half-tanned pelt; the exposed portion of his narrow back was crisscrossed with old scars, new scars, and several raw, blistering stripes the Corvu overseer must have laid on just that morning.

Grije Van Polder made a critical appraisal of his companion, letting his temper subside. Now he would have to climb back up and move the rifles, just because his draggle-pated, approval-hungry "friend" knew where they were hidden. Or would he? Was it strictly necessary?

He'd watched the Corvu scourge hundreds of docile Nilians, forcing them to sweat their lives away in Corvu mines; watched them carrying, fetching, cleaning, doing any and all menial, degrading tasks commanded by the Corvu. But complain? Never! There seemed to be no Nilian emotion other than subservient aplomb. He doubted that any conceivable torture could make Gunga Din reveal the existence of Terran weapons.

"*Balcav* come down. . .mountain," managed Gunga Din. "Now, before water fall fr-from. . .sky. Save Va'poler from. . .*Balcav.*"

So that was it! Often, near the end of the dry season, *Balcav*, a species of large, nocturnal carnivore, had been known to descend into the valley looking for water. The spear and knife would be slightly less effective than spit against fangs and talons! "Why, thank you," said the xenologist with heavy sarcasm, his anger surging once again. "And the Corvu? Will you save me from *them* while you're at it?"

He instantly regretted saying it. It was like losing one's temper with a pet spaniel, and even less productive. A cowed look in his large dark eyes, the old Nilian backed away, hanging his shaggy head, saying nothing.

Van Polder felt a pang of shame. Badgering poor Gunga Din amounted to sheerest ingratitude; the well-meaning wretch had been damned helpful—indispensable, really—bringing them water and food of sorts, as well as a rare form of comfort. Oftentimes, he had sensed a patient survival quality in Gunga, as in all

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Nilians; the stolid ability to last until things got better, to believe in golden tomorrows that never came, to wait out the marauding *Balcav*, and the sarcastic, ungrateful Terrans. Perhaps enough staying power to also wait out the devouring Corvu, he thought. Perhaps, but he wouldn't bet on it!

Van Polder gently touched the Nilian's thin arm. "Come, let's go down together." He picked up a sharp rock lying beside the trail. "You watch behind us, Gunga Din. I'll go ahead."

The Nilian stood somewhat taller. "I. . .eyes behind," he said with shy pride. He shambled after the Terran, not forgetting to cast crafty rearward glances every five paces.

Leaving the trail, Grije Van Polder found it muggy and uncomfortable on the valley floor. Bethrapha had dropped behind the scarp; only the chromaed arc light of Betelgeuse hung over the hut as he waved good-by to Gunga Din and rolled open the sliding door.

Ono sat behind the collapsible deal table, spooning up thick globs of Nilian gruel. Mashbravatan lay sprawled on a cot, his eyes closed.

"The guns were okay." Van Polder sniffed, jerking his thumb. "Has he been at the brandy again?"

Ono nodded. "Not very much left. I've been getting lots of despair and kismet and that sort of crap out of him all afternoon. What worries me, Van, is what he might decide to do after the brandy's gone."

"I know. Not that I'd blame him."

"Uh," grunted Ono, rising with perceptible effort from behind the table. "There's more of this Nilian slop, if you want it. My advice would be to fast."

Van Polder came forward, his mouth suddenly dry. "What's the matter?"

Ono winced. "Oh, we had visitors while you were gone—Horolaas and six or seven of his goons. They kicked Mash around some, though he was too fried to really care. They leaned on me a bit, too." He turned. Four neatly spaced welts curved across his broad back. "Can I get you to rub on some of that ointment?"

Van Polder felt the blood rush to his face. He stood clenching and unclenching his fists. "Sure, sure. Filthy bastards!" He snatched a tube of medicated cream from the cabinet shelf, urging Ono to sit back down and lean over the table with an angry gesture. "What did they want?"

The Lalandian forced a grin. "I'm not sure—just exercise, probably. Horolaas was in his many-splendored Spartan mood, as always, all supereefficient officer of the master race, and a yard wide.

"Oh-h-h," he groaned as Van Polder touched his back. "I fed him a bundle of gibberish about you being off somewhere hunting—not that he believed me. There seems to be some kind of flap over at their headquarters, big trouble for Maas Faatas and his staff. Horolaas hinted that things were maybe a little too easy for the magnificent Corvu warriors here on Nile. Seems their 'conquest'

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–hah, isn't that a laugher!–has turned sour. Shame that a fine, spirited race like the Corvu has to waste time 'conquering' Nile. Why, you could take this woebegone crop of spineless baboons with two old maids and a broom handle. Ow! Take it easy!"

"Sorry. What do you make of it?"

"Um," reflected Ono, "I kind of think Marshal Faatas expects us to help him figure out the psychology of his Nilian slaves, Van."

"Help him!" Van Polder capped the tube, tossing it back on the shelf. "Fat chance!"

"Uh-huh." Ono ruminated for a moment. "Say, we've discussed Corvu motives from time to time. Invading Nile in force makes little sense, when you think about it. So the Corvu are from somewhere nearby in space–so what! The 'empire' they rant and boast about seems at best a pretty rinky-dink affair–a half dozen backwater worlds, or so.

"Then they grab Nile. Some grab! Sure, there are heavy metals here, even a sprinkling of transuranics. They drive the poor Nilian slobs night and day in their filthy mines, but is there a single plant for *processing* ore on Nile? Hell no! Nor is there liable to be; you can't teach Nilians to build simple shelters for themselves, let alone ore processing equipment. They hole up in their caves and do all the Corvu dirty work, but what *else* is in it for the Corvu?"

"Domination," said Van Polder.

"That simple, eh?"

"Unless you can think of a better rationale, yes. I can't. Why continue mining useless ore, when shipping it spacewise would make it the most expensive ore in the galaxy? The Corvu must've thought to break the Nilian's spirit, just as they've undoubtedly broken every other species they've subjugated–a taste of the lash three times a day, and sweat for your supper. They had no way of knowing it wouldn't work with Nilians. Now they have four or five medium-sized mountains of raw ore–and a problem."

Floyd Ono stretched gingerly, seeking a comfortable position. He finally placed his muscular forearms flat-pressed on the table top, looking sidewise at Van Polder from narrowed eyes. "Van," he said hoarsely, "if I felt a mite better just now, I'd go collect the guns from up yonder, wait for first light outside headquarters, and see how many Corvu pigs I could pot before they potted me!"

Van Polder looked deflated. "I thought we'd decided to play the game to the end," he said.

"We're near the end. I smell it." One said.

"Not. . .necessarily," objected Van Polder. "We live or die at the whim of Maas Faatas; we've known it all these months. Why give up now and commit suicide?"

"Grin and bear it; turn the other cheek!" raged Ono helplessly. "What if they grab us tomorrow, have themselves a party? You've seen

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them slice up a Nilian; a ring of 'officers and gentlemen,' with a poor Nilian abo in the middle. Those scimitars are sharp, baby, and those big, ugly buggers know how to swing 'em! Never a mortal swipe; just grazing flicks—hundreds of them—until the Nilian bleeds from every pore. Then the ranking officer steps up and takes his head."

"I've seen."

"What really sickens me," emphasized Ono, "is that behind the ring of Corvu warriors there're always a few Nilians, watching calmly, never moving a muscle. Van, if that were to happen to me, without a chance of my taking some of those scuts with me, I'd. . .I'd. . .!"

"I know," sympathized Van Polder. "I feel the same way."

"Then go back up and get the rifles!"

The xenologist frowned. "Floyd, I won't pretend I'm not worried about being caught out, but you know we can't hide the guns safely here on the valley floor. Their air patrols would detect the metal, investigate. One thing I'll give them; they're thorough.

"No, let's think about it. Our best and only chance is probably to tough it out the way we've been doing. The Nilians are too easy for them—no satisfaction in pummeling soft dough—and we're too hard. We break, but we don't bend. Faatas likes that challenge; he'll keep punching away at us until we *do* bend."

"You and me, maybe," was Ono's caustic comment, "but what about Mash?"

Van Polder swallowed uncomfortably. "Yes, I realize. . ."

"The brandy's almost gone," reminded Ono. "Without it, I think he'll fold awfully fast."

"Possibly, Floyd, but we should. . ."

Both men stiffened at the screaming whine overhead, forgetting to breathe, listening for the sound to doppler away into the distance as the Corvu air patrol swept by on its nightly bedcheck flight. Instead, the whine deepened as an aircar raised dust, landing outside. An artificial breeze gently rocked the hut.

Ono licked his lips. "They've. . . come back!"

Before Van Polder could reach the door, it was slammed open against the stop. The huge, bull-necked figure of Horolaas loomed in the doorway, cracking his swagger stick impatiently against one lumpy thigh, his gray-hided caricature of a face crinkled in a scowl.

"The Van Polder, the Ono, and the Mashbravatan will accompany me to the living presence of His Eminence, Grand Marshal Maas Faatas," ordered Horolaas in a roar offering no compromise.

Corvu Imperial Headquarters was cheerful as a tomb. The main building, constructed of native rock, showed innumerable evidences of forced Nilian labor—crooked walls, doorways out of plumb, jagged lines of grout and mortar here and there.

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Instead of the showplace depicted in Corvu architectural drawings, the rulers had ended with a castle-like monstrosity which Van Polder hoped might someday crash around their hairy ears in a mound of badly squared rock.

Horolaas marched imperiously into the throne room ahead of them. Van Polder could hear high-pitched Corvu squeaking and gargling through the open doorway. Then the brutish officer reappeared. Dismissing the six hulking guards with a single, hateful volley, his commanding gesture bade them enter.

Supporting Mashbravatan, who was still in a flaccid alcoholic daze, the two men more or less dragged him into the presence. It was something like being in a wax museum; Horolaas held his salute as if made of granite, while twenty elite guardsmen lined the bare stone walls like attendant statues.

Marshal Faatas looked up from a long table beside his throne, his blockish bald head, now bared, resembling nothing so much as one of the stones in his castle's walls. But the bulging eyes, above a snout that passed for a nose, gave him away. Faatas, Van Polder had long ago decided, was as vile and repulsive as the others, but nevertheless quite a shrewd specimen.

The xenologist stepped forward, tipping his head. "Good evening, Your Eminence..."

A backhanded cuff sent him reeling to his knees. Horolaas reared over him, half a meter taller than he, outweighing the three humans combined. "The Van Polder will remain silent unless spoken to!"

He slowly regained his feet, ears ringing, and glared at Horolaas for an instant in frustrated impotence, then simply waited.

Marshal Faatas emitted a burst of squeaks and gargles which caused Horolaas to perform a ponderous salute and retire against the wall. Faatas rose, solemnly confronting them. "The Mashbravatan is indisposed?" His Terran was excellent through long practice. After learning of the Terrestrial Imperium, Grand Marshal Faatas had decided to accommodate himself to the language as a matter of furthering his career when Terra and Corvu at last met head to head. Privately, he relished the notion of surprising his superiors at that cherished moment.

"He's not feeling well," informed Ono placidly. "Something to do with his diet, I imagine."

"Diet!" The marshal barked a laugh. "He is drunk! We know everything there is to know about you Terran weaklings. His weakness is greater, even, than those exhibited by you yourselves. Weakness piled upon Terran weakness; where will it end?

"You, for example," snapped Faatas, "the Ono. We know you are quick to anger. It has earned you a sore back on many occasions, no?"

"Being bullied might make even a Corvu warrior angry," said Floyd Ono tonelessly.

"Not angry—*furious!*" retorted

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the marshal, stung. "The bully would feel great pain before he died, great pain and suffering!"

"And if there were a hundred bullies...?"

"Were there a million," roared Faatas, "before he at last went down, they would know they'd faced a Corvu *warrior!*"

"Most commendable, Your Eminence."

"Be silent!" Faatas heaved his bulk around, preening himself. "You, the Van Polder, are you not a specialist, a scholar who deals with cultures other than your own?"

Van Polder nodded. "I've spent my working life on one planet or another, Your Eminence."

"Yes. You have been seen constantly in the company of a particular Nilian. In fact, you and he have climbed the escarpment many times together. What have you learned about these miserable Nilian creatures?"

Van Polder shrugged, calming the sudden icy knot in his stomach. "Very little, really. Our equipment, our tools and research aids were confiscated when we—"

"They shall be returned to you immediately. You will commence your study of the Nilians at first light tomorrow." It was a simple statement of fact rather than a command.

Van Polder pondered it, daring a questioning glance toward Ono. "I think not," he said firmly. "What we've seen here on Nile has us convinced that any information we might pass on to you about the Nilian aborigines would be used to their detriment."

Grand Marshal Faatas swelled visibly, threatening to burst the tight collar of his silver tunic. "You dare this with *me?* Must I have my officers form a little ring, Terrans? You have witnessed the lively game they play!"

"Oh, yes," drawled Grije Van Polder. "We've seen Nilians chopped, mangled, broiled alive, whipped to death. You are very, very good at it.

"But the work my friends and I do isn't the sort of thing torture can force. Xenology is ten percent research, ten percent intuition, and perhaps as much as eighty percent empathy. Speaking for myself, I could never identify with the Nilians, pitying them as I do."

"Weakling idiocy!" Faatas pounded the table with a ham-like fist; the sound produced approximated nearby thunder. "Identify with those spineless vermin, indeed!" He whirled and took to pacing the irregular stonework floor. Tripping slightly over a protruding edge of rock, he barked something in staccato Corvu. "Hellish place! Nothing is right; nothing!"

Marshal Faatas charged back, eyes bulging as if steam might shortly jet from his hairy ears. "Very well! You would rather slave your bowels out with those Nilian beasts in the mines? Think well before you answer; I mean it!"

Van Polder's legs turned rubbery, but he somehow managed a show of

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nonchalance. "Oh, I was getting bored sitting around the hut. What do you say, Floyd?"

"A spot of exercise might do us good," agreed Ono.

"So be it!" The marshal snapped his thick fingers, producing an explosive bang. Guards poured through the doorway and seized them roughly.

"I say, we're being rousted," mumbled Mashbravatan.

Before they were dragged away, Grand Marshal Faatas bent close. "Every breath you draw will be an agony," he promised. "You will toil until you drop, and then toil some more. Holographic records will be made of your labors in the Corvu cause—three learned citizens of all-conquering Terra, sweating their fragile lives away in the putrefying mines!"

Horolaas saluted with a graceless flourish. "The dungeon, Your Eminence, or—?"

"No, no," shouted Faatas. "Return them to their place. Should they try to run off, tracking them down will make for excellent sport."

Horolaas' braying laughter accompanied their ignominious exit. Van Polder had the nightmare feeling that he was in some strange zoo, that one of the animals was laughing at him.

Sultry night had fallen over the valley when Horolaas booted them from the hovering aircar. As they were helping Mashbravatan toward the hut, Gunga Din materialized out of the darkness. Van Polder was surprised and pleased to see him.

"I'll take Gunga with me," he told Ono quietly. "We'll bring down the guns and set up a real surprise for them."

"I'm going with you," declared Ono.

"Don't be stubborn, Floyd. Save your strength for tomorrow. And for God's sake see that Mash sobers up! We'll need him."

"Rifles. . .gone," informed Gunga Din.

Van Polder and Ono whirled together, letting Mash sag into a sitting position on the hut's doorsill. "Gone!"

"Gunga Din. . .move," said the old Nilian.

Van Polder slumped. "Whew! You gave me a bad moment. . ." He stood stock still, staring at Gunga Din. "You said 'rifles,' Gunga Din. Where did you learn that word?"

"No time for word games, Van. Ask where he hid them."

"Hold it a second, Floyd. I will, but. . .we've worried so about losing our single trump card that I've been careful even *thinking* about the guns. Where did you hear that word, Gunga?"

"Fr-from. . .Va'poler," insisted Gunga Din.

"Uh-uh! No, Floyd, it just ain't so! I categorically deny saying 'rifles' in his presence."

"Then someone else must've—me or Mash. For the love of. . .! *Find out where they are!*"

"Rifles. . .close. Gunga Din. . . show."

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"Better and better!" Ono waxed his hands, clapping Van's shoulder enthusiastically. "Take off; I'll feel a helluva lot better with a rifle in my hands!"

"All come," Gunga Din surprised them by saying. "Important."

"No, Gunga," countered Van Polder. "I'll go with you; the others will stay here." In an aside to Ono, he said, "Soak Mash's head in a pail of water if you have to. Get him sober!"

"All. . .come," repeated the Nilian doggedly. "Important."

The two men exchanged glances in the pale orange light of Betelgeuse, now hanging close to the black face of the scarp. "*That,*" suggested Van Polder uncomfortably, "falls under the general heading of uncharacteristic behavior. I smell fish."

Ono froze. "Big fish, Van; lots of them. Look behind you."

Perhaps as many as thirty Nilians had materialized like shadows from the darkness under the trees surrounding the clearing, and were slowly edging toward the hut. At a low-voiced word from Gunga Din, the group flowed around them in a silent ring.

"All go. . .now," suggested Gunga Din. "Hurry."

"I, uh, believe I see your point, admitted Floyd Ono with grim humor.

Too amazed to comment, Van Polder watched three or four Nilians lift Mashbravatan and walk off with him. It was like being in a moving corral; they were neither pushed nor shoved, but the inexorable Nilian advance effectively herded them across the clearing and northward along the face of the escarpment. He made several attempts to object, but the old Nilian had fallen into a steady, measured gait not to be broken by conversation.

They walked for ten mystified minutes until Mashbravatan revived, making a sudden demand. "Put me down!" he urged. "No good being carted about like a ruddy corpse, you know. There's a good chap!"

Ono filled Mash in to the best of his limited ability as the mysterious stroll continued, while Van Polder tried from time to time to interest Gunga Din in explaining what was happening.

The party stopped abruptly. Four Nilians broke through the ring, engaging Gunga Din in earnest, hushed conversation. Two of them appeared to be carrying something, though the poor light made it difficult to discern just what it was.

"I say," put in Mashbravatan; "listen to that! There's a polysyllabic flow to their speech."

"Can you understand it?"

"Oh, a word, a phrase now and then. But, damned interesting jabber for a simple hunting and gathering cave folk, what?"

Van Polder nodded thoughtfully. "It *does* sound different."

One of the Nilians passed Gunga Din what appeared to be a small satchel complete with handle. Three others then accompanied the one carrying the larger object off through

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the ring, walking into the trees in the general direction of the Terran hut.

"That. . .bag," gulped Ono, "was a *manufactured* item!"

"What's going on?" demanded Van Polder for the tenth time. "Gunga, where are you taking us?"

"There." The Nilian pointed upward at the scarp. "Caves."

"Our rifles are up there?"

"Rifles. . .there. Must hurry. Come."

The path became quite steep after another ten minutes of climbing. The party strung out in a long, meandering file, with the three humans tucked neatly in the middle, staying close together in the deep shadow of the scarp face which shielded them from the baleful glow of Betelgeuse.

The three men were gasping when they reached a narrow, canted shelf fronting the cave mouth. Gunga Din and his retinue made no motion to enter, grouping themselves along the ledge overlooking the valley. Gunga Din turned, saying simply, "Watch."

"Watch what?" grumbled Ono. "There's nothing out there to watch. Tell him to quit futzing around and get the rifles, Van."

Van Polder had begun to do just that when a bright spark erupted on the valley floor. Seconds passed before the fulminant crack of an explosion rolled across the cliff face and murmured away into stillness.

"Dammit, the hut!" gasped Ono. "The Corvu have blown up our hut!"

"That doesn't make sense," denied Van Polder, conviction in his tone. "Not the Corvu; not their style. Perhaps our Nilian friends have done us in, Floyd. Those four with the parcel must have planted a charge after they left us."

"Nilians! Nonsense, where would Nilians get a bomb?" objected Mash.

"Inside," directed Gunga Din, "quick."

"I say," said Mashbravatan in an injured voice, "your Nilian friend seems to have gotten awfully bossy lately, Van."

They were herded unceremoniously into the blackness of the cave, stumbling toward the dim glow a fire cast somewhere deeper inside. As they drew near the fire, three ancient crones rose and scurried toward the depths, which struck Van Polder as gloomy and drear, containing nothing but musty, unappetizing smells, and what looked like a few half-tanned hides spread over beds of leaves.

"Save. . .fr-from Corvu," announced Gunga Din, stepping forward with the satchel in his hand. He opened it. "Va'poler. . .fr-friend."

Van Polder swallowed apprehensively. "I like to think so, Gunga," he said soberly. "But you have much explaining to do. Why have you—?"

"Later," fended the Nilian. He turned away, hiding something from view.

There were scuffling sounds close beside Van Polder in the darkness. He heard Ono cry, "Watch it, Van! Cut and run!"

Suddenly, he was firmly pinioned from behind. Gunga Din came

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toward him, a medical syringe in his bony, gnarled slave's hands.

"Va'poler. . .fr-friend," he repeated, plunging the short needle home in the struggling Terran's upper arm. "Sleep now."

It was quick-acting, whatever it was; Van Polder felt the numbness ooze through his body like soothing balm. The flickering walls of the firelit Nilian cave wavered and became indistinct. Fuzzily, as in a dream, he thought he saw solid limestone fold slowly inward to reveal a smooth-walled, brightly lighted corridor running deep, deep into the mountain.

Then he was lifted and carried into oblivion.

"Reveille, Van! Come, come, wake up!"

Van Polder sighed, groping his way back to full consciousness. Swarthy, bearded, armed with the carefree grin of old, Mashbravatan was shaking him, with Ono at his elbow.

"That's ever so much better. Welcome to Paradise!"

Van Polder lifted his head gradually, yawning. He rubbed his eyes, feeling fine and clear-headed and very, very hungry. The bed he lay in was neat, immaculate; the room had a white, antiseptic look about it, and he found himself wearing a short robe that felt like linen. Mash and Ono, dressed likewise, smiled down at him from the bedside. "What happened? Where are we?"

"Paradise," shrugged Ono. "It's Mash's idea, but I'm inclined to agree. It's more sensible than anything I can come up with. Wait till you see the Nilian houris running in and out, pretending they're nurses. Nothing at all like the half-starved witches we saw before."

"No, no," chided Mash, exasperated. "No bloody 'houris' exist in the Hindu pantheon—"

"Stop it!" Van Polder ripped back the coverlet and swung his feet to the warm floor. "Gunga must've hidden us," he guessed, "after blowing up the hut to mislead the Corvu. But, are we inside the mountain? What *is* all this?"

"Confusing, isn't it," chuckled Mash. "Sorry, we chaps just woke up, too. We're quite short of answers. And the Nilian staff, if that's the proper term, seem deuced uncommunicative. Perhaps, if we wander about, they'll find us something decent to eat."

It seemed as valuable a notion as any other. The outer corridor led past many closed doors to a large, rock-walled chamber filled with potted plants, benches, scattered tables and chairs—and five dark-eyed young Nilian girls who smiled and continued about their business.

Van Polder's jaw dropped; the girls were svelte, dressed in identical, form-fitting gray smocks—and conspicuously mammalian. "One of you'd better pinch me!" he muttered.

"Devil with you! Let's pinch *them!*" suggested Mash.

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"See what I mean?" smirked Ono.

Van Polder dropped into a lounge, dazedly shaking his head. "I was once watching a tri-di play," he murmured, "when the projectionist put on the wrong reels—wrong setting, wrong actors, wrong everything. I feel just like that now."

"Hullo, Van," hissed Mashbravatan, pointing, "you simply won't *believe* this!"

Grije Van Polder sprang to his feet. The stooped, eternally shuffling figure of Gunga Din was striding purposefully toward them, head up, smiling. "Mr. Van Polder, Mr. Ono, and Mr. Mashbravatan," he said in perfect Terran, taking their hands one after the other. "I'm delighted to see you looking so well. We regret keeping you asleep much longer than we had anticipated, but the Corvu were a stubborn lot."

"Were!" Ono pounced on the word, starkly incredulous. "Do you mean the Corvu have been. . .?"

"No, no, Mr. Ono, they've simply left us. The day of our deliverance, so long coming, is here at last. Nor will the courageous sacrifices of those slaughtered thousands who did not live to see this day ever be forgotten on Nile!"

"But," objected Van Polder in a strangled voice, "it *couldn't* have been a hoax! Your artifacts and weapons were the work of *primitives!* I'd stake my reputation on it!"

"Aye, and you would win, Mr. Van Polder. We have our own remote ancestors to thank for them. Reproductions, of course."

Mashbravatan swore a fervent Hindi oath, clapping his hands in disbelief. "But, sir, your *culture?* There is absolutely no evidence that a civilization ever *existed* on the surface of Nile."

"Quite right, Mr. Mashbravatan," said Gunga Din sadly. "Erasing our cities, our dams, roads, bridges, homes, was heart rending. Adoption of the plan was fought tooth and nail until. . .

"You see, we govern ourselves by limited oligarchy—I believe that comes closest in your terms. We had been monitoring Corvu frequencies for centuries, while guarding our own transmissions, imagining ways to prepare for them as they drew ever nearer, but postponing, procrastinating.

"At last, the better minds among us pronounced The Plan to be our *only* road to survival—as free creatures, at least. Convincing the major portion of our populace to go underground had to wait until their hideous 'empire' engulfed a stellar system but seven light-years away.

"The Oligarch then decided to implement The Plan on a crash priority basis, overriding the votes of both legislative bodies in so doing. It was an excruciating decision; conscripting the tens of thousands of psychologically screened martyrs who were trained as 'primitives' caused much bitterness, bringing our Nilian civilization to the brink of revolution and collapse. And your Terran exploratory vessel, some time ago, frightened us badly. We were

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almost ready—almost, but not quite. I sincerely hope to earn your forgiveness for failing to warn off your landing party. We simply could not take that chance."

"But, how can you be certain the Corvu have really abandoned Nile?" asked Van Polder.

"Or that they won't return?" demanded Ono.

Gunga Din smiled, "Our intelligence people intercepted the recall message," he told them. "Grand Marshal Faatas is returning to Corvu in deepest disgrace. He will live but a short time thereafter. Their custom dictates a rather horrid, barbaric ritual—immediate self-immolation in some public place.

"As to your question, Mr. Ono, the Corvu undoubtedly *will* return to Nile—but hopefully not for many, many cycles. Let us examine the psychology behind my easy assurance. After Faatas' disgrace, no Corvu marshal will care to undertake the subjugation of such an 'easy' race again—all to lose, and nothing to gain, you see. Feigning your 'deaths' in the explosion of your hut was mandatory, since Faatas would have certainly taken you back to Corvu with him."

"But," objected Ono, "our hut was empty."

"Not. . .empty," guessed Van Polder numbly. "Our hut was. . .occupied."

Gunga Din nodded sadly. "Three additional Nilian martyrs, Mr. Van Polder. The Corvu were far too thorough not to make a biomedical investigation, and mammalian tissue is mammalian tissue. We felt that we, er, owed it to you.

"But, you see," he went on, "when at last the Corvu *do* return, or learn of us, we shall be ready. Believe me, sirs, we shall be very, *very* well prepared!"

Van Polder's eyes widened in sudden suspicion. "May I ask. . .That is, who is your Oligarch now, sir?"

The old Nilian looked directly into his eyes. "I hold that honorable office, Mr. Van Polder. Attempting to pronounce my true name would be catastrophic, save possibly for Mr. Mashbravatan. But," he said with feeling, "I have given serious thought to adopting the name bestowed upon me by a trusted friend and companion.

"May I ask the derivation of the name Gunga Din, Mr. Van Polder?"

"I. . .yes," said the xenologist, his eyes misted. "A Terran poet, long, long ago, who was a sort of xenologist too, in his own way, admired the courage of a native water carrier in a war-torn foreign land.

"I can't remember all of it. The final stanza ends like this:

Though I've belted you an' flayed you,
By the livin' God that made you,
You're a better man than I am,
Gunga Din!

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This absorbing and ultimately chilling story conerns a teacher on sabbatical in Morrocco and what happens when he consults a magician to help find the body of his wife, who has disappeared in the desert.

Black Sabbatical

by JOSEPHINE SAXTON

JEREMY WENT DOWN TO THE magician's house again. He knew it would be a pointless visit, but there was nothing else he could do. There would be the ritual pipe of crude hash, the same request from himself to do something about finding his wife, and the regretful refusal. But they would not part before a larger sum had been offered and regretfully refused. The old man would say that he could do many magics, but not the magic of finding a lost woman, alive or dead. And surely she was dead? Surely.

Jeremy saw his small friend El Frieda on the way. Or was her name Elfreda, he would never know. She could speak English and French almost fluently, but she could not master the writing and spelling. He had spent hours with her on such lessons, without success. She was eight, born in Marrakesh, visited Casablanca, and lived most of her life here, about ten k's from Ain Leuh. She sold prickly pear at the side of the road, or rather, sat hour after burning hour and sold perhaps two dirham's worth in a week. Sometimes she begged in Marrakesh when they visited the house of her uncle, and at this she was very skilled. Jeremy and Jean had first met her there in the square, peddling inferior henna which had spilled out onto Jean's white pants suit, causing some upset. They had met again in Ain Leuh the day of Jean's disappearance. They sat together on the dusty step to talk. Jeremy hoped that someday El Frieda would bring him news of Jean. He knew that it was a stupid hope, but he hoped it. He had two hopes. One was El Frieda and her possible news of a ginger-haired white woman in the household of some minor sheik, or the magician who would conjure up her whereabouts with his bones and drugs and filaments into the other world. Jeremy knew that he was out of his

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mind, but inside his mind it was too painful to exist. Inside his mind he had murdered his wife; outside of it she had merely got lost in the desert through her own bad temper.

"What have you to tell me today, El Frieda?"

"Nothing, Jeremy, sir. I made no sale. Fifteen kilo of prickly pear I have to throw in the ditch, it is rotten and last night only couscous without meat. My father he said no meat for her she is lazy. But it is not that, he does not want me to be strong. You see, the magician has spoken about me, to my father. He had me marked, he says, from birth. Yesterday, I am the strongest of the family."

This news was not of an unusual nature, for El Frieda's father was a great devotee of the magician, and the old men traded insults as readily as cloth or slippers. This marking of the child as the strongest, even greater than her father, would be little more than an attempt to damage the ego of the opponent. Bargaining took many forms in Morocco, not least of which was veiled insults. He laughed.

"Fear none of them, El Frieda. You will get meat tonight." He gave her a fifty franc piece, and she greedily hid it under her robe, somewhere in a little purse tied to her belt. Then, when the coin was safe, she thanked him, kissing his hand and looking up at him slyly. He hated her to do things like that, it was servile. And the look in her eyes was something that upset him more than anything he could think of. It reminded him of Jean after they had had one of their torrential and frequent quarrels. For a little while always she would become like a doe or a spaniel. She would even quote from *Midsummer Night's Dream* at him, smiling and pawing his arm. He wondered sometimes if Jean had been slightly psychotic. Always raving about independence and yet unable to be alone without falling apart, the screaming, the bickering, the attempts at domination—that they had both made. He admitted for a moment that he had loathed her and that they were very ready for divorce. She had given him three children and brought them up very badly. They would never be what he called "normal," not only because of the manner of their mother's death, but because of her shabby treatment of them. She had not infrequently shouted out to them, aged four, seven and nine, that she hated the sight of them and that she wished they had never been born. They had been accidents, did they realize....

He turned right away from that picture of her. He did not want to remember. It was unnecessary. All that was necessary was that he find her, dead or alive, and get her back to England for a proper burial. And then begin work again. At the end of his sabbatical year. He also had a great deal of work to do on the book that he was supposed to be doing in that year that the college had granted him. A book on Moroccan tiles, both the tiles of the mosques and of the

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market squares, the common work on wells and fountains, house floors. It was to be lavishly illustrated, and it would make him quite a lot of money. But he would have to go back to work as a teacher of ceramics in the Midlands eventually. In seven months time.

"I must go to the magician's house." El Frieda had gone, she had left the step silently, almost certainly to visit the market where flyblown meat was sold. She was so much older than any of his own children in her ways–for eight years old she was truly astonishing. But then, so were all the Moroccan Arab children. Self-sufficient, independent, sly in trade and clever in bargaining and the ways of Europeans. So he went on down the deserted street to his friend's house. The magician. He had been introduced to the old man by one other that he had met and confided in on the day of Jean's disappearance, in a tiny cafe in Kasba Tadla, the nearest source of any police, so the locals had told him. Weeping with sudden rage and humiliation, he had told the old fellow everything, all about their terrible quarrel in the desert that night they had camped with the children, having missed the way at Ain Leuh and taken the Sahara road by mistake. How they had accused each other in louder and louder voices in the silent night, the children silent or whimpering by turns, Jean trying to cook rice and meat on the last of the camping Gaz, the worry about not having enough petrol to get back to the main road the next morning, the bickering about whose fault it all was, and his plea that a night in the desert was surely an adventure, could she not just relax and enjoy it? He had said that to enrage her, knowing that she had always had a dream of a romantic night spent under canvas in the desert, but that to have to cook and quarrel during it, and then to not make love, which they had not done for months, would be hurtful to her dream. . . .

The old man had surely not understood half of what he had told in English and broken French, but he had eventually written down an address with the help of some other tourist, and gone away, leaving Jeremy with only that to hold on to. The police were trying, but what could they do with such a case? For the fact was that in the sandy waste, not a hundred yards from the metalled road, Jean had suddenly screamed, thrown down the pot of stew into the sand, bawled that she was finally and forever leaving him, and run off into the black night bellowing like something wounded. Which she undoubtedly was. They both were. He had followed her just a few steps and then gone back to the tent and the children who were frightened of being left alone. And in the back of his mind was the thought that if he got lost in the night, they would have no one to look after them. There were black vipers in that desert somewhere, perhaps not so near to the road, but quite possibly.

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And scorpions. Jean was in danger. They were all in danger. He could remember everything about that night. She had not returned. He had waited. He had stoked up the fire. He had sung songs to the children. He had shouted to her, for over an hour he had shouted. He had tried to sleep, got up, waiting for dawn. He had finally drifted off to sleep sitting up and jerked awake with the sun in his face, the howling of one of the children loud in him. No Jean. He had driven up and down the road in desperation. He had not known what to do. There was sandy waste everywhere, no habitation. He could not imagine what had happened to her. Stolen by a passing truckful of Arabs? There had been no trucks. Out in the desert, collapsed with scorpion bite? The land was flat, she was not in sight. Gone over the horizon on foot? If so, into some of the most hostile and hallucinatory country in the world. Perhaps she was living with Berbers? But it did not seem likely. She would demand to be taken back to a town, and they would not dare refuse. There were no wild animals large enough to eat her, as far as he knew. So he had driven back to Kasba Tadla, told the police, told the man in the cafe, arranged for the children to fly back to the grandmother in Wales, saying hardly anything to them, for what could be said, except that he would return home when he had found their mother.

And he would. He had found the address written on the paper after about a week and visited the man there, who had turned out to be the village magician, not a local man but one from the Sousse. He had many tattoos on his face and hands and ankles, and had no hair except a tuft on the top of his head, rather in the manner of certain Red Indian tribes. He had not spoken at the first interview, and Jeremy had not discovered what his trade was until the following night in another cafe, where the local Arabs had told him with much respect and some scoffing that the old fellow was certainly the only hope of finding a disappeared wife, and that he would demand a very large fee.

"There are not many men with wives worth what he demands. I have heard of disappearing women, but never have I heard of one that was found by that old dog. He wants too high a price, and there are many women." This witticism had brought a great deal of laughter up out of the half-stoned group, sitting there sucking up hash mixed with terrible tobacco. But something about the magician had fascinated Jeremy, and he returned the next day. They had gotten on to the subject after about the fifth visit. There had been grins and nods and shakes and extra hash and mint tea but neither price nor task mentioned clearly. It was not going to be rapid, and Jeremy was anxious that something be done quickly. Eventually he pleaded for speed, and the old man had said simply:

"It is not likely that she lives. But

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I can bring her back to life if she is discovered, dead." And the rest of the interview had been silent. Jeremy had sat on, finishing his mint tea, and had returned to his small hotel without comment. He had been vastly amused by all that, having had no idea that such nonsense still went on in the modern world. Especially in that part of Morrocco which was in many ways so enlightened. But the old man was from the Sousse, far south where Africa began to be more African, strange nameless regions of desert, oasis, secret villages and moving caravans that went to Timbuktu. Wild men who had an annual kind of durbar at Tantan, where nothing else happened all the remainder of the year, it seemed to exist so that men from all over the Sahara could come and show off their prowess at horsemanship and shooting. And superstition was abundant amongst such people.

The old man was living here only as a visitor, he had been there almost a year, but the locals told Jeremy that he would go away again after the spring of the following year, he traveled around like that to avoid the police keeping too close a watch on him, for his practices were illegal. He healed people, found lost things, cursed people who cheated in bargaining and occasionally did things for crops. Especially the tomatoes, which seemed prone to tobacco virus at times. He could cure that with certain incantations. He was not a very usual figure, and his magic was not local magic, therefore the more powerful. Opinion was divided in the cafes about its effectuality. Jeremy was full of scorn about the whole thing, but there was nothing else that he could do; it was a kind of sociological survey that he was doing. He might even perhaps put a bit about the old man in his book, for the fellow's rented house had the most magnificent tiles on one of the floors. Jeremy had taken several photographs. The Moroccans were always so hospitable and generous; he was merely being friendly with one of the local characters; he was not really consulting a magician. The heat was intense. It was towards the end of August, and there was a strange heavy humidity in the dust-laden air, and everyone, even the Arabs, seemed to be suffering from a kind of hay fever. There was a lot of dysentery about amongst all those tourists that passed through; he could see in every party a white mask beneath the requisite tan, and several visits to the lavatory were quite usual. He himself had seemed to recover from what must have been hepatitis rather rapidly and now felt strong and alive and very well indeed, even in the heat and dirt. His hotel was primitive, with a filthy outside toilet arrangement, but he did not complain. He had to stay here, it was the only possible place to be, where the police would find him. When they found her. Which of course they would not. She had disappeared. It was as if she had wandered off the earth into another dimension that

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horrid night. Just like Jean to die in a manner like that. Inconvenient, dramatic, hurtful, troublesome. Why the devil could she not have caught typhoid and popped off quietly in a hospital, where they all knew where she was and could mourn her and forget? They would have been recovering now. As it was, they could not speak of her in the past tense. Alas. And his moods fluctuated like that, from hard bitterness to sugary regret and sentiment, even to the glorious passion they had experienced together so many years ago when they had first met. He caught himself saying out loud things like:

"Jean, when I rescue you from this hell, we'll love together just like the old days; we'll recapture everything we ever lost." And then he would hate himself so much for the schmaltz and the Hollywood-ness of himself that he would make himself do something he hated, walking along the main road and back, three miles each way, but a pastime that he had discovered exhausted him thoroughly enough to put him to sleep the instant he got back and lay down. He went to the police station every other day. One day they advised him to return to England; they would let him know if anything turned up. They were extremely sorry, but they could do nothing more about the unfortunate case. They were embarrassed. There really was nothing more to be done. But he told them that he was writing a book and that it would take him several more months, so he would not be leaving. Wearily they looked at his passports, visas, permissions, bankbook, and waved him away. He was doing no harm, he could of course stay. But to find his wife, that was not possible, except perhaps by a miracle.

The old magician specialized in miracles. At a price. Today Jeremy seated himself down on the blue and white plush cushions and after a while of pleasantries they began talking about the price. Jeremy had not again mentioned the business of bringing Jean back to life if she were found. He did not want to go into that. He just did wonder, though, if this man had a gift for psychometry. If he gave him Jean's handbag, for instance, could he perhaps sense where she might be sought? It was not too ridiculous: several tales were told locally of his successfully finding objects at a distance by this method, and water divining was authentic enough, and there were people like Peter Hurkos whom he had seen in a film. Tongue in cheek of course, but it was possible. Perhaps. The old man seemed not quite ordinary in many ways. For instance, he never told how he opened the door without getting up. Jeremy had searched for the string or invisible thread but had not found it, and yet, whenever the magician waved his hand, the door would open or close at his bidding. It could seem rather eerie in that cool dark room after coming in from the baking heat and noise of the street. Very impressive. After a long while spent

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discussing the origins of the tiles on the floor the old man suddenly spoke in a sightly different voice.

"My bargain with you is unusual. I need for every large magic one wind-dried corpse. They are quite common on the edges of the Sahara, certain people bring them to me, but there are never enough. I need special things from them for my magic. You understand me? But in your case you are wanting to find just such an object, for your wife is surely that by now? Well, bring her to me and I will give her life. At one other price, something I cherish even more."

Jeremy pretended at first that he had heard nothing. Then, desire for logical order prevailed.

"My dear fellow, I do not know where to look, or I would not ask for your help." How stupid and mad these old Arabs could be. It would all turn out to be a riddle full of wisdom in a minute; they could often not distinguish what was hurtful and real from. . . .

"But I will give you a talisman first that will lead you to her. It will be simple. You will walk out one night from the place where she left you, and before dawn you will find her. I have never failed in such. I shall take from you for that two hundred dirham. And then bring her back to me, and we can speak again of things. I shall be happy to see you." The English was incredibly good, hardly any mucked-up syntax, a very good accent.

"Where did you learn your English?"

"As the son of the wealthiest and most powerful magician in the whole of the Sousse, I was sent to Gordonstoun Public School in Scotland, for a period of five years. I believe one of your dukes attended that school, but I was not his contemporary. I have also a degree in biology from Sussex University, but my career was predetermined. I have a calling, and my father taught me more than any other person or persons. And this is more lucrative. I charge high fees for great things. Everyone comes to me either in the first instance or the last resort."

"And you still expect me to believe that you have actual magic powers? How did they go down at Gordonstoun?"

"I had not been initiated at that time. My father taught me his craft after puberty and before I returned to Sussex. Naturally discretion forbade me to mention my powers in the common room, although one was tempted to curse occasionally. I was once insulted, but the consequences of my revenge would have been out of proportion in England. Here things are different. And I have no abiding interest in modern Western biology; it is too thin, dealing only with appearances, not with realities. It is not satisfying for a career."

Jeremy was already making this information into a truly interesting story to tell to the staff when he returned to his job. "There was this old magician fellow, topknot, hash pipe, robes, the lot. Then he tells me he was educated—of all places! And

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what's more he had a degree in biology. . . ."

The old man had stopped speaking. Jeremy took his leave as soon as he politely could without discussing further any business about Jean. Possibly the story about his education was not true; he could have got all that information from anywhere and anybody; the whole thing was becoming more and more unlikely and unsavory. Perhaps he was not only a charlatan in magic but in ordinary things also. Many people had found it advantageous to say that they had a degree, when they had been nowhere near a university. But Jeremy could not quite decide what the advantage would be in the old man's deceiving him about that. It was quite senseless. A figment caused by the hash, perhaps, He made his routine call to the police station, knowing that if they had any information they would have come to his hotel. Then he went and posted the letter to his mother and the children. They were all, or possibly just one of the boys, to come over for a two-week vacation. He doubted the wisdom of their coming to the scene of their mother's disappearance, but his mother wanted to come, and there would be the problem of what to do with the children during her absence. Maybe it would be better if just the eldest boy came. Charles was the most sensible of them, and he would be quite capable of traveling alone, under the tender care of some air hostess. There was also the expense to be thought of. During a sabbatical year, there was no pay. He had saved up for this trip for many years. Jean had grumbled often about the penny-pinching for what she sarcastically sneered at as his "fabulous trip to the orient," although she wanted to go abroad even more than he did. To him it was work. The book on tiles. He went home and sorted out some slides and prints, and went over his introductory chapter once again. He could think of no improvements.

The following afternoon found him in the house of the magician again. As usual the door opened as if by itself, and Jeremy as usual gave it a hidden ritual sneer. Nylon thread magic! He sat and smoked, and one of the servants brought in mint tea, and the magician then said that unfortunately, that day, he had no time to stay and talk. He was very sorry but he had visitors. They were old friends of his from Essouiria on the coast. So Jeremy took the hint and got up, noticing as he did so that the outstretched hand of the magician was not held for him to shake, but held a small package. He automatically put out his hand but stopped short of taking the package until the other nodded his head, with some impatience. It was a small bundle of something wrapped in yellow silk of the kind he recognized as being "shantung"; his mother had extolled the virtues of such material when he was little, and he remembered petticoats and knickers hanging on a bedroom chair. They been very soft and thin and papery,

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and they had needed a lot of careful ironing. He fingered the package and then began to undo the knotted string that was wound around it.

"No, no!" shouted the old man, very angry suddenly. Then Jeremy knew what he was holding. It was the talisman that would lead him to Jean.

"I am not sure. . . ."

"Your one chance, friend. And the price before you leave if possible." There was a terrible hardness about him now. The money or else. Well, Jeremy had the money on him. Against all wisdom he carried cash, and it was for this purpose. He had had the same cash in a Manila envelope ever since they had first started discussions about the price of services rendered, many weeks ago. In a dreamy way he took the envelope out and counted out several five pound notes. They were more valuable to Moroccans than dirhams; it was illegal, but they welcomed English money more than any other kind. It too was a salable object, and a profit could be made.

Then he left the house without either of them speaking again and went home and found himself lying down on the bed, sweating, feeling sick. He must be cracking up to do a thing like that. Wasting eight-five pounds on a package of rubbish! He must chuck up this sabbatical year, go home, get another job, set up house somewhere, provide some security for the children, leave all this nonsense behind. He had enough material to write a book on tiles; he could do it just as well in England. He had a touch of fever, which he hoped was not dysentery. He slept, although it was only four in the afternoon and he had never been in the habit of taking a siesta. It was dawn the next day when he awoke, and he had dreamed of a lake in the Sahara, a blue lake that even in the heat of the midday sun was icy cold, too cold to bathe in, but heaven to drink. But the more you drank, the more thirsty you were.

He got out of bed and made mint tea, terribly impatient during the infusion, longing to drink the cool water in the pitcher, but knowing that such impatience could lead to illness and even death. Then, when he had drunk his tea and got dressed, he packed a small bag with a change of clothes, the minimum necessities for a short journey, went out and bought some food supplies from the little general store down the street, loaded everything into the Rover, and set off. In his pocket, buttoned securely in, right against his chest, was the bundle wrapped in yellow silk. He was there before sunset and slept in the back of the Rover wrapped in a handwoven blanket that he had paid twenty dirham for and had been offered the same type of thing for half that price the following day. Everything changed from day to day and place to place in Morocco, there were no constants. He found the place where they had camped, for there in the sand was a can, a deplorable object he thought, kicking it. He knew it came from

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their supplies; it was an unusual brand made in small quantities in England, oyster soup with Guiness. Delicious. Jean's favorite, rather expensive. So he stood there for a while determining in his mind in which direction she walked away that night. He mentally placed the Rover and the tent and the moon, and decided that she had walked away from the road in a slanting direction towards—but there was nothing to go towards.

He set his compass, checked his flask of water, and set off. It was slow progress, the sand was fine, almost dust, and his way was impeded by scrubby growths that might in the spring become flowering bushes but were now like primitive grave-markers on an ancient battle-field. He walked on, leaning forwards and slurring his feet because this was easier, and sometimes looked around to see if there was anything appearing on the horizon. It would seem that this plain extended infinitely. Then he saw a distant cloud of dust rising up, a minor whirlwind, and stood gazing at this for a while; there was nothing else to see. He sometimes thought that through the dust he could see distant mountains, but it was uncertain, amorphous. He walked on, and the sun began to go down. He did not think that perhaps he had better retrace his steps, try again another time, that he had been foolish to come without a sleeping bag. He did not think of anything. He did not even remember that he was looking for anything any more. The business of putting one foot before the other became everything. He was exhausted, drenched in sweat, and longed for a breeze. There was nothing. Near him the air was still, there were no plants any more, just red stones and occasional lumps of quartz. He continued. He had pains in his back and his head, and his insides churned. Perhaps he would have dysentery again, that was a nuisance. No tablets seemed to help very much. There was not much light left. He stopped and looked around. It was almost certain that there were mountains in the distance now. The dust storm had settled and they were clearly visible. The red evening light struck them; they looked unreal, like volcanoes suddenly broken up through the ancient crust of dust and sand. Like Japanese paintings, thought Jeremy. And he lay down in the sand, shifting around to move small stones. He looked up at the stars appearing; he felt cooler. He slept.

He lay on the couch in the magician's house. They had given him mint tea, and, alone in the upper room in the cool shadows, he thought about getting up for a while. He had got up yesterday for a while; it had been quite successful. But he still felt very weak, and events were not always clear. He was still not certain if his mother and son had been to visit yet, or just the boy, or whether their visit was yet to come or if they had decided not to come at

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all. These facts were uppermost in his mind all the time he was awake, and worried him very much. Stick to things which had really happened. The old magician leaning over the bed, saying that he had done very well, been clever. But before that, coming to the house with El Frieda at evening. And the child crying loudly into silence as the old servant woman led her away. He could make no sense of that. And Jean's dustproof wristwatch, still ticking. He put out his hand to the small octagonal table and picked it up. It was an expensive watch that her father had given her for coming-of-age, years ago. It was wound annually, dustproof and waterproof and shockproof. It was still ticking and keeping perfect time, according to his own watch. Which might not perhaps be correct. But Jean wore that watch all the time, sometimes even in bed, which angered him unreasonably. He put it down again and carefully got out of bed, staggering slightly and upsetting the small brass tray that had held the mint tea. In about thirty seconds there was the old woman in the room clucking away and halahar-habing away at him. She seemed very concerned.

"I am much better tell downstairs. I am coming down. Much better." Shouting at her, using his hands. As if she were deaf and stupid rather than foreign. He managed to get himself into some clothes and went downstairs. There was no one in the magician's main room. He went through into the kitchen, and there was only the old woman washing glasses in filthy water. Something was cooking outside on the earth stove, and it smelled very good. Perhaps he should eat more in his convalescence. Dysentery took it out of you somewhat. But he was so very much better; the smell of food was good, an excellent sign.

"Where is the old man?" She pointed with the wooden spoon that she stirred the stew with, and Jeremy went across the little courtyard and knocked at the door.

"I am pleased to see that you are well," said a voice behind him, and there stood the old man. The door he had knocked on remained closed.

"I am much better. Thank you. You have been very kind. But it is perhaps time I started to set my affairs in order. I have things at the hotel, and there is the Rover somewhere, and there is the visit of my family, and my book to write. You have been very kind, so very...." The magician was holding up both his hands.

"Everything is in order. We have long since got your things from the hotel; everything is paid for you, and the Rover is in the street at the back of my house, and is guarded constantly by boys. You have nothing to worry, all your things are very safe. About your family, there is some mail for you which we got from the post office."

The old woman handed him three packets. There were thin letters from two of his colleagues and one from

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his mother. She had made arrangements with Aunt Jessie to have the children for three weeks at the very most and would be arriving on the 14th, Marrakesh airport. It would help if he could fetch her, or perhaps if not then he could let her know and she could make her own arrangements. Imperious as ever, disguised as sweetness and a willingness to oblige. Nothing puts me out Jeremy, but it would help if you could just do this or do that.... He felt like tearing it up for a moment but folded it carefully, then got it out of the envelope again, and looked at the date.

The 10th.

"What date is it?" he demanded. It was the sixteenth. His mother already here. Alone, angry, there would be scenes, explanations.

"Do not worry, I had her met with a car at the airport and she is staying in an excellent hotel, and has a guide of the souks. She has already spent rather more than she intended. Her purchases include three sets of Safi drums for the children." The old man was not looking at him but was watching a scorpion in the dust at his feet. Jeremy jumped backwards and staggered. The old man pointed at the insect, and it remained perfectly still.

"You must have opened my letters!"

"Such indiscretions are neither mine nor necessary. I can read the contents of letters just by holding them." He moved his hand and the scorpion dashed forwards but scuttered around his naked foot as if frightened of it. Jeremy did not know what to say. And then: "What did you tell her about me?"

"I told her that I was your doctor and that you must not be disturbed for a day or two. We got on rather well; she is a pleasant old lady with delicate manners. She will visit here this evening for dinner. You had better be bathed and dressed properly by then; it would seem that she is the kind of person to be shocked by your appearance." Jeremy looked down at himself, and the shabbiness of it was not good. Dusty, and his toenails needed cutting. Odd, that, he was rather meticulous about such things. And then the hand exploring his own face. Long stubble, unprecedented in his life; his hair on his collar; his fingernails, long and filthy.

"What has been happening? I do not remember everything." And as he said it, he did remember something, the date of his journey into the desert. He had been away, somewhere, for almost a month.

"You were ill for a long time after your return. But everything is all right now. And my part of the bargain is completed. You will see her soon."

"What time is she coming?"

"She is here now, but you are not quite ready for her. Go bathe."

"I thought you said tonight...."

"Your mother tonight. When you are ready, you will meet your wife, Jean."

He did not speak, for the words

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would not come, and he wanted very much to fell the old man, see him bleed into the dust, have done with all the horror of this charlatanry, the holding out of the awful ideas, the possible miraculous truths. He realized that he had almost believed everything the man had said since they had met; something had made him believe, partly, against his will and reason. He hated. He hated. He fell into the dust.

He was sitting in the main downstairs room, clean, and smelling of some sweet-scented soap that he would never choose for himself. He was shaved and brushed, cross-legged on the blue and white plush cushions, and in front of him there was the glass of mint tea in its silver holder, on a small brass tray bearing the symbol of the Hand of Fatima.

He waved his hand, not thinking, and the door opened. Jean paused a moment before entering and then rushed towards him, smiling. She knelt in front of him and reached out her hands, and he stretched to touch her. Her reddish hair was just as it ever had been, not white with the sun and in strands scattered on the sand. Her skin was its own milky fairness, the freckles the only dark marks, no dry blisters and black burns. Her eyes were their own pale grey, smiling out at him, not the gloating pebbles smaller than their leather sockets. Her teeth showed only a little, her very good teeth; they did not grin horridly from black dry shrunken lips.

"Jeremy." She spoke, not as before, sitting beside him in the Rover all those miles, saying nothing, only stupidly sitting, shriveled and bent and black and uncommunicative, turned in on herself as if forever, hugging her stomach as if she had a pain, although she had been beyond pain.

"Jean."

"Call me El Frieda," she said softly. "The days of our dissonance are over. I live again through her." There would be no explanations, the old man never explained anything. Jean seemed to shed light in the dim room; she softly rose and led him up and out by the hand. They went out into the late afternoon sun, and the shops were opening, and people were slaking the dust at their steps with buckets of dubious liquids. They passed El Frieda's house and it was all shut and mourning flowers were dry at the step. Children in the street began to follow and gather, shouting. The English phrases that he heard he did not like. The Madman. They were all laughing. Then at the end of the street he saw the large black car stop, and his mother get out alone and stand there. Then when the car had gone, she saw him and started towards him, arms outstretched. She came nearer and nearer, and as always when they met and Jean was there, she ignored her until they had embraced. He hated her for that. Jean had hated it too. He looked at her to see what reaction there was. He looked at her and looked at her.

(continued on p. 142)

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ISAAC ASIMOV

SCIENCE

Seeing Double

I CURRENTLY DO MY WRITING in a two-room suite in a hotel, and about a month ago, I became aware of someone banging loudly against the wall in the corridor outside. Naturally, I was furious. Did whoever it was not realize that within my rooms the most delicate work of artistic creation was going on?

I stepped into the corridor and there, on a ladder, at the elevators, was an honest workingman banging a hole into the wall for some arcane purpose of his own.

"Sir," I said, with frowning courtesy, "how long do you intend to make the world hideous with your banging at that hole?"

And the horny-handed son of toil turned his sweat-streaked face in my direction and answered jauntily, "How long did it take Michelangelo to do the ceiling in the Sistine Chapel?"

What could I do? I burst out laughing, went back to my cell, and worked cheerfully along to the tune of banging that I no longer resented since it was produced by an artist who knew his own worth.

Things take as long as they take, in other words. And even Michelangelo's long stint on his back, painting

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that fresco, pales into insignificance in comparison to the length of the intervals it took to build some corner or other of the majestic structure of science.

In the 17th Century, for instance, a question arose about light which wasn't answered for 148 years despite the fact that, till it was answered, no theory as to the nature of light could possibly hold water.

The story begins with Isaac Newton, who, in 1666, passed a beam of sunlight through a prism and found that the beam was spread out into a rainbow-like band which he called a "spectrum."

Newton felt that since light travelled in a straight path, it must be made up of a stream of very fine particles, moving at an enormous speed. These particles differed among themselves in some way so that they produced the sensations of different colors. In sunlight, all the different particles were mixed evenly, and the effect was to impress our eye as white light.

In passing obliquely into glass, however, the light particles bent sharply in their path; that is, they were "refracted." Particles differing in their color-nature were refracted by different amounts so that the colors in white light were separated within the glass. In an ordinary sheet of glass, with two parallel faces, the effect was reversed when the light emerged once more from the other side so that the colors were again merged into white light.

In a prism, it was different. The light particles bent sharply when they entered one side of the triangular piece of glass, and then bent a second time in the *same* direction on emerging through a second, non-parallel side. The colors, separated on entering the prism, were even farther separated on emerging.

All this made excellent sense, and Newton backed it up with careful experimentation and reasoning. And yet exactly what was different about the particles that gave rise to the various colors, Newton couldn't say.

His contemporary, the Dutch physicist, Christian Huygens, suggested in 1678 that light was a wave phenomenon. This made it possible to explain the different colors easily. A light wave would have to have some particular length, and light of different wavelengths might well impress the eyes as of different colors (just as sound of different wavelengths impresses the ears as of different pitch).

Still, waves had their own problems. All man's experience with waves (water waves, for instance, and sound waves) made it clear that waves curved around obstructions. Light, on the other hand, travelled in a straight line past obstructions and cast sharp shadows.

Huygens tried to explain that away by presenting a mathematical line of reasoning that showed that the ability to curve about an obstruction depended on the length of the wave. If light waves were *much* shorter than sound waves or water waves, they would then not

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bend, detectably, about ordinary obstructions.

Newton recognized the convenience of the wave theory, but could not go along with the suggestion of waves so tiny they would cast sharp shadows. He stuck to particles, and such was his eventual prestige, that scientists, by and large, went along with the particle theory of light in order not to place themselves in disagreement with Newton.

But in 1669, a Danish physician, Erasmus Bartholinus—a thoroughly obscure individual—made an observation which assured him a place in the history of science, for it raised a question the giants could not answer.

Bartholinus had received a transparent crystal which had been obtained in Iceland, so that it became known as "Iceland spar," where "spar" is an old-fashioned term for a non-metallic mineral.*

The crystal was shaped like a rhombohedron (a kind of slanted cube) with six flat faces, each one parallel to the one on the opposite side. Bartholinus was studying the properties of this crystal, and I presume he placed it on a piece of paper with writing or printing on it on one occasion. When he picked it up, he noticed that the writing or printing was double when viewed through the crystal.

In fact, when one looked through the crystal, it turned out that one was seeing double. Apparently each beam of light entering the crystal was refracted, but not all to the same extent. Part of the light was refracted a certain amount and the remainder another and greater amount, so that though one beam entered the crystal, two beams emerged. The phenomenon was called "double refraction."

Any theory of light had to explain double refraction, and neither Huygens nor Newton could do so. Apparently, the waves, or particles, of light must fall into two sharply-defined classes so that one class can behave in one way and the other class in another. The two-way difference can have nothing to do with color, for all colors of light were equally double-refracted by Iceland spar.

Huygens' view of light waves was that they were "longitudinal waves"; that is, similar to sound waves in structure (though much shorter in length) and that they represented a series of compressions and rarefactions in the ether they passed through. Huygens did not see how such longitudinal waves could fall into two sharply different classes.

Nor could Newton see how light particles could be divided into two sharp classes. He speculated, rather vaguely, that the particles might differ among themselves in some fashion analogous to the two opposed poles of a magnet, but he didn't follow that up, since he was at a loss for any way of finding evidence for the suggestion.

Physicists were forced to back away. Bartholinus' observation didn't

Actually, Iceland spar is a transparent variety of calcium carbonate, if that helps any.

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fit either of the current theories of light, so, as far as possible, it was to be ignored.

This was not wickedness on the part of scientists; nor the obtuse workings of a conspiratorial "establishment." On the contrary, it made sense.

Suppose a piece doesn't seem to fit a jigsaw. If you stop everything and start worrying exclusively about that troublesome piece, you may never get anywhere. If, however, you ignore the piece and continue working at other parts of the jigsaw, using whatever system seems convenient, you may eventually reach a point where, through the *other* work, new understandings are reached, and suddenly the old piece that was once so troublesome fits into place with no trouble at all.

Double refraction was not forgotten altogether, of course. Even as late as 1808, it was still sticking in the scientific gizzard, and the Paris Academy offered a prize for the best mathematical treatment of the subject. A 23-year-old French army engineer, named Etienne Louis Malus (who accepted Newton's particle theory), decided to see what he could do in that direction. He got some doubly-refracting crystals and began to experiment with them. As it happened, he did not win the prize, but he made an interesting observation and coined a phrase that entered the scientific vocabulary.

From his room he could see out on the Luxembourg palace, and, at one time, sunlight was reflected from a window of that palace into his room. Idly, Malus pointed a doubly-refracting crystal in that direction expecting to look through it and see two windows. He did not! He saw only one window.

Apparently what happened was that the window, in reflecting the sunlight, reflected only one of the two classes of light particles.

Malus remembered that Newton had said that the light particle varieties might be analogous to the opposing poles of a magnet. Thinking along these lines, he felt that only one pole of light had been reflected, and that the beam shining into his room contained only particles with that one pole.

Malus therefore spoke of the light beam that entered his room as consisting of "polarized light." The phrase stands to this day, even though it is based on a false speculation, and even though the notion of poles of light was, in actual fact, being killed dead even before Malus had made his observation.

In 1801, you see, an English physician, Thomas Young, began a series of experiments in which he showed that one beam of light could somehow cancel another intermittently, so that the two would not combine to give a smooth field of light, but rather a series of bands, alternately light and dark.

If light consisted of particles, such "interference" was extremely difficult to explain. How could one particle cancel another?

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If light consisted of waves, however, interference was childishly easy to explain. If light consisted of alternate rarefactions and compressions, for instance, then if two light beams fitted together so that the compressed area in one beam fell on the rarefied area in the other and vice versa, the two lights would indeed cancel out into darkness.

Young was able to explain every characteristic of his interference pattern by Huygens' wave theory. To be sure, many physicists (especially English physicists) tried to resist, in the name of Newton. However, not even the most glorious name can long resist observations that anyone could confirm and explanations that explain perfectly. So the wave theory won out.

Yet Young could not explain double refraction any better than Huygens had.

But then, in 1817, a French physicist, Augustin Jean Fresnel, suggested that perhaps the light waves were not longitudinal after the fashion of sound waves, and did not represent alternate compressions and rarefactions in the ether. Perhaps, instead, they were "transverse waves," like those on water surfaces; waves which moved up and down at right angles to the line of propagation of the wave.

Transverse waves could explain interference just as well as longitudinal waves did. If two light beams merged, and one was waving up where the other was waving down, and vice versa, the two would cancel and two lights would make darkness.

Water waves, which serve as a model for light waves, can only move up and down at right angles to the two-dimensional water surface. A ray of light, however, has greater freedom. Imagine such a ray moving toward you. It could wave up and down, or right and left, or anything in between and always be waving at right angles to the direction in which it was moving. (You can see what this means concretely, if you tie one end of a long rope to a post and make waves in it, up-and-down, right-and-left, or obliquely.)

Once such transverse waves were proposed, they were accepted with remarkably little trouble, for through them, the phenomenon of double refraction could finally be explained, 148 years after the problem had arisen.

To see that, consider that the light waves in an ordinary beam of light could be waving in all possible directions at right angles to the direction of travel—up-and-down, left-and-right, and all degrees of in-betweenness. That would represent ordinary or "unpolarized" light.

Suppose there were some way of dividing the light into two varieties, one in which all the waves move up-and-down, and the other in which all the waves move left-and-right.

For each wave in unpolarized light which vibrates obliquely, there would be a division into two waves, of lesser energy, of the permitted classes.

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If a particular wave were just at 45° to the vertical, just halfway between the up-and-down and the left-and-right, it would be divided into two waves, one up-and-down and the other left-and-right, each with half the energy of the original. If the oblique wave were nearer horizontal than vertical, then it would be broken up into two waves, with the left-and-right having the greater supply of energy. If it were nearer the vertical, then the up-and-down would end with the greater supply of energy.

It is easy to show, in fact, that a beam of unpolarized light can be divided into two beams of equal energy, in one of which all the transverse waves are in one direction, while in the other all the transverse waves are in a plane at right angles to the first. Since in each case, all the waves move in a single plane, the unpolarized beam of light can be viewed as broken up into two mutually perpendicular "plane-polarized" beams.

But what causes light to break up into plane-polarized beams? Certain crystals do. Crystals are made up of serried ranks and files of atoms arranged in very orderly array. Light, in passing through, is sometimes compelled take up waves in certain planes only.

(You can see a crude analogy of this if you were to pass a rope through a picket fence and tie it to a pole somewhere on the other side. If you make up-and-down waves in the rope, they will pass through the opening between the pickets, so that the rope on the other side of the fence also waves. If you make waves left and right, the pickets on either side of the opening stop those waves and the rope on the other side of the pickets does not wave. If you make the rope wave in every which way, only those waves which will fit between the pickets at least partly will get through and on the other side of the fence, whatever you do; there will only be up-and-down waves. The picket fence polarizes the "rope waves.")

Crystals such as Iceland spar will permit only two planes of vibration, one perpendicular to the other. Unpolarized light entering Iceland spar breaks up into two mutually-perpendicular plane-polarized beams within. The two beams of polarized light interact differently with the atoms, travel at different velocities, and the slower beam is refracted through a greater angle. The two beams take separate paths within the crystal and emerge in different places. It is for that reason that looking through Iceland spar causes you to see double, and Bartholinus' puzzle is solved.

Plane polarization can also take place of reflection. If an unpolarized beam strikes a reflecting surface at an angle, it often happens that those particular waves which occupy a certain plane are more efficiently reflected than those in other planes. The reflected beam is then heavily or even entirely plane-polarized, and Malus' puzzle is solved.

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In 1828, a Scottish physicist, William Nicol, introduced a new refinement to Iceland spar. He sawed a crystal in half in a certain fashion* and cemented the halves together with Canadian balsam. When light entered the crystal, it split up into two plane-polarized beams, which travelled in slightly different directions and hit the Canadian balsam seam at slightly different angles. The one that hit it at the lesser angle to the perpendicular passed through into the other half of the crystal and eventually emerged into open air. The one that hit it at the greater angle was reflected and never entered the other half of the crystal.

In other words, a beam of unpolarized light enters the "Nicol prism" at one end and a single beam of plane-polarized light emerges at the other end.

Now imagine two Nicol prisms lined up in such a way that a beam of light passing through one will continue on into the second. If the two Nicol prisms are lined up parallel—that is, with the atom arrangements oriented in identical fashion in both—the beam of polarized light emerging from the first passes also through the second without trouble.

**I am tempted every once in a while to present diagrams, and on rare occasions I do. I am, however, primarily a word man, and I try not to lean on pictorial crutches. In this case, the exact manner of dividing the crystal doesn't affect the argument, so the heck with it.*

(It is like a rope passing through two picket fences in both of which the pickets are up-and-down. An up-and-down rope wave that passes between the pickets in the first fence will also pass between the pickets in the second.)

But what if the two Nicol prisms are oriented perpendicularly to each other? The plane-polarized beam emerging from the first Nicol prism is refracted through a greater angle by the second one and is reflected from the Canadian balsam seam in it. No light at all emerges from the second prism. (If we go back to the picket fence analogy, and have the pickets in the second fence arranged horizontally, you will see that any up-and-down waves that get through the first fence will be stopped by the second. No rope waves of any kind can go through two fences if the pickets are vertical in one and horizontal in the other.)

Suppose, next, that you arrange to have the first Nicol prism fixed in place, but allow the second Nicol prism to be rotated freely. Arrange also, an eye-piece through which you can look and see the light that passes through both Nicol prisms.

Begin with the two Nicol prisms arranged in parallel fashion. You will see a bright light in the eyepiece. Slowly, rotate the second prism, which is nearer your eye. Less and less of the light emerging from the first prism can get through the second since more and more of it is reflected at the second's Canadian balsam seam. The light you see

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becomes dimmer and dimmer as you rotate the second prism until, when you have turned through 90°, you see no light at all. The same thing happens whether you rotate the prism clockwise or counter-clockwise.

Using such a pair of Nicol prisms you can determine the plane of vibration of a beam of polarized light. Suppose such a beam emerges from the fixed Nicol prism, but you are not sure as to exactly how that prism is oriented. That means you don't know the location of the plane of vibration of the light emerging. In that case, you need only turn the rotating Nicol prism until the beam of light you see through it is at its brightest*. At that point, the second prism is oriented parallel to the first, and from the position of the second you know the plane of vibration of the polarized light.

For this reason the first, fixed, Nicol prism is called the "polarizer," and the second, rotating, one, the "analyzer."

Now imagine an instrument in which there is a space between polarizer and analyzer into which a standard tube can be placed containing some liquid transparent to light. To make sure conditions are always the same, the temperature is kept at a fixed level, light of a single fixed wavelength is used, and so on.

If the tube contains distilled water, nothing happens to the plane of polarized light emerging from the polarizer. The air, the glass, the water, all may and do absorb a trifle of light, but the analyzer continues to mark the plane at the same point. If a salt solution is used in place of distilled water, the same thing is true.

But place sugar solution in the tube, and something new happens. The light you see through the analyzer is now greatly dimmed, and this is not the result of absorption. Sugar solution doesn't absorb light significantly more than water itself does.

Besides, if you rotate the analyzer, the light brightens again. You can eventually get it as bright as it was originally, provided you completely alter the orientation of the analyzer. What it amounts to is that the sugar solution has rotated the plane of polarized light. Anything which does this is said to display "optical activity." The instrument used to detect optical activity and measure its extent is called a "polarimeter."

A useful polarimeter was first devised in 1840 by the French physicist, Jean Baptiste Biot. He had pioneered in the study of optical activity long before he devised the polarimeter (to make his work easier and more precise) and even before Nicol had first constructed his prism.

As early as 1813, for instance, Biot reported certain observations

*It isn't so easy to tell when the light is brightest, but there is a device whereby the circle of light you see is divided into two half-circles, and you turn the prism until the two half-circles are equally bright, something easy to determine.

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that were eventually interpreted according to the new transverse wave theory. It turned out that a quartz crystal, correctly cut, rotated the plane of polarized light passing through it. What's more, the thicker the piece of quartz, the greater the angle through which it was rotated. And still further, some pieces of quartz rotated the plane clockwise and some rotated it counterclockwise.

The usual way of reporting the clockwise rotation was to say that the plane of polarization had been rotated to the right. Actually, this is a careless and ambiguous way of reporting it. If the plane is viewed as straight up-and-down, then the upper end of it is indeed rotated to the right, when it is twisted clockwise, but the lower end is rotated to the left. Vice versa, in the case of counterclockwise rotation.

However, once a phrase enters the literature it is hard to change no matter how poor, inappropriate, or downright wrong it is. (Look at the phrase "polarized light" itself, for instance.) Consequently, something that rotates the plane of polarized light clockwise, is said to be "dextrorotatory" ("right-rotating") and something that rotates it counterclockwise is "levorotatory" ("left-rotating").

What Biot had shown was that there were two kinds of quartz crystals, dextrorotatory and levorotatory. Using initials, we can speak of *d*-quartz and *l*-quartz.

As it happens, quartz crystals are rather complicated in shape. In certain varieties of those crystals, just those varieties which show optical activity, it can be seen that there are certain small faces that occur on one side of the crystal, but not the other, introducing as asymmetry. What's more, there are two varieties of such crystals: one of which has the odd face on one side, the other of which has it on the other.

The two asymmetric varieties of quartz crystals are mirror images. There is no way in which you can twist one variety through three-dimensional space in order to make it look like the other any more than you can twist a right glove so as to make it fit a left hand. And one of these varieties is dextrorotatory, while its mirror image is levorotatory.

It was quite convincing to suppose that an asymmetric crystal will rotate the plane of polarized light. The asymmetry of the crystal must be such that the light beam, travelling through, must be constantly exposed to an asymmetric force, one which pulls, so to speak, more strongly in one direction than the other. So the plane twists and keeps on twisting at a steady rate the greater the distance it must pass through such a crystal. What's more, if a crystal twists the plane of light in one direction, it is inevitable that, all else being equal, the mirror-image crystal will twist the plane in the opposite direction.

You might even argue further that *any* substance which will crystallize in either of two mirror-image forms

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will be optically active. Furthermore, if two mirror-image crystals are taken of the same substance and of the same thickness, and if all the circumstances are equal (such as temperature and wavelength of light) then the two crystals will show optical activity to precisely the same extent—one clockwise, the other counterclockwise.

And, indeed, all evidence ever gathered shows all of this to be perfectly correct.

But then Biot went on to spoil the whole thing by discovering that certain liquids, such as turpentine, and certain solutions, such as camphor in alcohol and sugar in water, are also optically active.

This presents a problem. Optical activity is tied in firmly with asymmetry in all work on crystals, but where is the asymmetry in the liquid state. None that any chemist could see in 1840.

Once again, then, the solution of one problem in science served to raise another. (And thank heaven for that, or where would there be any interest in science?) Having solved Bartholinus' problem and Malus' problem by establishing the existence of transverse light waves, science found itself with Biot's problem—how a liquid which seemed to have no asymmetry about it could produce an effect that seemed to be logically produced only by asymmetry.

Which brings us to Louis Pasteur's first great adventure in science—next month.

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Patrick Meadows ("A Rag, A Bone," August 1971) returns with a refreshing story about a County Health worker whose search for a mysterious animal that has bitten a young boy turns into an unforgettable experience.

Supernovas and Chrysanthemums

by PATRICK MEADOWS

HIS NERVES STILL JANGLING from the Meadowbrook Parkway traffic, Gil Blanes threw himself into the swivel chair at his desk. He reached to his shirt pocket for the much-needed cigarette, and he surveyed the rows of furniture in the office. The flurry of activity of the lesser employees was under way. Buxom Sandy Dawson sat down and chose some papers at random for the top of her desk. When her section chief, hairy Abe Fierst, appeared on the scene, she could rivet her attention to the sheets a few moments and feel no trepidation when she left for the coffee shop. Already she was drinking from a container half-hidden in the top drawer. Susan What's-her-name, the new girl in the vaccination section, sat down before she disposed of her purse and slipped off her light jacket. And just in time, because old Barnes was standing in the doorway to see whom he could attack for not being on time.

Gil riffled through the papers he had left in an untidy pile the day before. He selected one with an address far enough from the Nassau offices to keep him out until lunch. He lit the cigarette he had finally fished out of the almost empty pack, and he read the brief report.

REFERRED BY: James L. Hancock, 47 Landis Street, Massapequa.

TELEPHONE: MA5-9678.

NATURE OF INCIDENT: Son was playing in a vacant lot adjacent to 54 Landis Street. Was attacked

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and bitten by animal, receiving superficial lesions of the forearm. Treated at Freeport Doctor's Hospital, Doctor Robert Fallat. Released same day, 5:55 PM. Awaiting Rabies Report.

Gil looked at the date of the report. November 9. Yesterday. He had four days to locate the animal and take it to Mineola. Animal? What kind? What breed of animal? And was it a pet in the neighborhood, or a stray? He lifted his eyebrows and breathed out through pursed lips. Someday he might receive a carefully detailed description of a case, but it hadn't happened yet. He picked up the phone and dialed.

"Mrs. Hancock? This is Mr. Blanes at Nassau County Health. We received a report on your son's injury yesterday."

He waited while she launched herself on a diatribe against doctors and hospitals and everybody else who might be responsible if her son should die of rabies.

"Mrs. Hancock. Wait a minute, Mrs. Hancock. Hold on a second." He held the phone away from his ear and watched Sandy Dawson waggle her way toward the coffee shop. The voice was tinny in the receiver, and he waited for it to stop.

"Mrs. Hancock, there hasn't *been* a case of rabies in Nassau County in thirty-five years. It's not likely this dog has it. It was a dog, I take it. The report. . ." She started again.

"It *was* a dog," he said at her first pause. "It wasn't a dog? Then it was a cat?" She went on at some length. People were so obstinate, he thought. Try to help, and they block you all the way. "Mrs. Hancock, if you will listen. . ." She talked. He hung up.

He smoked another cigarette. When he stubbed it out in the ashtray, he dialed the number again.

"Hello. This is Mr. Blanes again." He waited while she apologized. "That's all right, Mrs. Hancock. I know you're upset. But for us to know what to do, you'll have to give us some information. I will be leaving the office for your house in fifteen minutes. In the meantime, try to find out as much as you can about the animal that bit your son. Understand? Is he home now? Good. Look for me in about an hour." He cradled the telephone and gathered a few papers, including other cases in the vicinity that were less pressing, some data sheets, and his dart gun and tranquilizers.

On the way to Massapequa he stopped at a diner and had a good breakfast. Looking around at the other customers, he had that feeling more and more common to him these days: *I am a stranger among them.*

In the next booth three salesmen sat in their black suits, talking and looking over presentation sheets. The youngest man was staring with much concentration at the sheets and hanging on the words of advice from the trainer.

There was a truck driver having coffee and a donut at the counter. Spelled across his back was

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SCHLITZ. Gil looked back with a touch of despair at the streaks of yellow left on his plate from the eggs.

He had spent three years in premedical studies. He was not a strong student, and holding two part-time jobs to make expenses hadn't helped. The summer position at Nassau County Health had extended into September, and he had decided at the last minute before registration to give in to his supervisor and stay on to save money. His senior year should go much better if he did not have to work. Now he realized that the months of petty paper work in the office had done something to him. The daily encounters with small people were worse. More often than not, they were selfish, quick to defend themselves, even when not attacked, and lacked dignity.

Gil was twenty-one years old, not bad looking, with rusty hair and brown eyes flecked with hazel. His mouth moved easily into a smile when he met people. He was eager to make them feel comfortable with him. He never ceased to wonder that they took him wrong. His job was simple enough. He had to find out which animals had bitten whom and when and trace them in order to have them examined. No matter what kind of animal; he had dealt with dogs, cats, rabbits, squirrels, once a mynah bird. Occasionally there had to be an autopsy.

That was the worst. To determine whether a dog had rabies, its head was removed. And if the dog was the pet of a six-year-old boy—well, you said you were sorry even before he knew what for, and you left in a hurry because you couldn't stand to see him cry when he finally understood.

And the parents, the adults. "Why pick on me?" they said. "Why Rover? He never bit nobody! See? Give him your hand. He wouldn't hurt a flea. And he's never out of the yard."

With a dozen witnesses swearing it was Rover, it made him feel sick, and not for the dog's sake.

He signaled the waitress for another cup of coffee.

What worried him was that he had worked out for himself that these were the same people whom he would be treating when, if he ever made it, he became an MD.

He stubbed out the cigarette, downed the last of his coffee, and paid the bill. He didn't look at the cashier's eyes. He was afraid he would be forced to confront another ungenerous person hiding behind a business-friendly face.

He made a fourfold series of left-then-right turns, working his way into the heart of a development. The street he was after was a long curving drive without sidewalks along the street's edge. There was a continuous, unblemished lawn connecting the frontage of each house to the next. It seemed to him that all the grass on both sides of the street had been mowed the same day of the week.

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He stopped at the curb in front of number forty-seven.

The number was spelled out in black iron above the front door. He was met by Mrs. Hancock and a ruffian Doberman barking his head off.

"Mrs. Hancock?"

"Come in. You're the man from the Health? I'll tell you we're worried sick. It's been twenty-four hours and we haven't seen any action. Thank God you're here."

He sat carefully on the sofa between scattered tin trucks and crayons. He removed the data sheets from the thin leather folder. He knew the dramatic monologue by heart and waited for the first opportunity to break in.

"Now, Mrs. Hancock, if you could tell me in detail what happened, then we can go have a look at the animal."

"I told three people already. Who knows where the brute is now? If he's dead in a lot somewhere or on a garbage dump, how will you. . ."

"There's still plenty of time to take care of your son. Don't you think. . ."

"I think poor Jamie's suffering, he may be dying, and you say there's time!"

Gil put his chin on his thumb, his fingers laid alongside his cheekbone. He put on his resigned look and waited for her to run down.

"Could I speak to your son? He is home, isn't he?"

"Jamie! Jamie!" She screamed up the stairs. "Can't leave him alone a minute or he disappears." She took two steps toward the stairwell. "Jamie! You hear me calling you?"

"Yes, Mommie. I came."

"Come faster when I call you."

"All right, Mommie."

Gil groaned silently. He was not more than five years old. Little chance of an accurate description.

Jamie appeared at the bottom of the stairs. Gil looked at him with surprise. No, he corrected the reaction: wonder. How could such an angelic face survive in this atmosphere? The boy's face was a delight. Fair skin, absolutely level, wide-set, blue eyes. Nose and lips of an English cupid. And obviously not suffering, he remarked to himself. There was a thin stain of iodine on his left arm.

"Jamie, the man's come to find the dog that bit you and take him away."

The boy turned his gaze toward him, and Gil sensed a kind of spiritual superiority in his manner. Not censure, not blame, but something akin to those things, but as far above them as this child was above the smallness of the woman who was his mother. "It wasn't a dog," he said, a matter of setting the facts straight, nothing more.

"Jamie! You *said* it was a dog."

"I said it was maybe about as big as a dog would be. But it wasn't a dog."

Gil wondered what it was. About the size of a dog, but not one. A raccoon?

"Maybe you could tell me what it looked like, Jamie?" He was surprised at the tone of his own

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voice. Not the phony sing-song he usually affected with children.

"It was a brown dog with spots," said Mrs. Hancock.

Neither Gil nor the boy paid any attention to her. Their eyes were locked. Gil wondered what in the world was happening.

The boy spoke carefully and without the sweeping phrases of children caught up in their own exaggerations.

"He was mostly brown, that's right. But he had all kinds of colors where he wasn't brown. Like flowers."

"Jamie!" There was a threatening tone in her voice, as though she had heard all this before and had made him promise not to say it again.

"He *was* a funny-looking thing," Jamie said, going on in spite of the interruption. His eyes caught fire as he said this, and he laughed lightly. Joy was very close to the surface in him. "His eyes looked me happy." He looked apprehensively at his mother and added quickly, "I know that's not saying it right, because mommie said so. But he *looked* me happy."

He started to hurry slightly, as if afraid his mother would silence him, or that he would not be able to remember all the words he needed. "He came up out of the canal where Johnny and I played, and Johnny was afraid and ran home, but I thought he was hurt, and I wasn't scared, and he was hurt. And he came to me and looked me to help him, but I tried to look him that I didn't know how, that maybe my daddy or the mailman could, but he looked me not to say anything, so I didn't, I stayed and tried." The hint of a wrinkle passed over his otherwise calm face.

Gil was spellbound without knowing why. He glanced at Mrs. Hancock. She was biting her lip and looking at something spilled on the carpet.

"He made me put my hand, I thought he said paw, but he meant hand, into the little bag tied around his neck." His mother started to say something, but it became only a small groan. "And I did it. He had lots of things in there. When I touched the right one, he made me know it and I got it out. It was shiny and very sharp." He looked at his mother. "I wasn't playing with sharp things, and besides, he told me."

"Mister. . ."

"Blanes," Gil said.

"Mister Blanes, you can see how upset he is. Can't you do something about finding that beast so we'll know if Jamie is all right?"

"First I have to know what it was that bit your son. He's all right. Let's let him finish." It was, he agreed silently, a weird story, but the boy seemed to be perfectly coherent. He looked back at Jamie.

The boy communicated his thanks and relief with a flick of the eyelids and continued. "It was like a long needle, and he said—he didn't *talk* it you know—that I could make him better by sticking it in his back, and I didn't want to, but his eyes were

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turning more purple, and I knew he wanted me to very bad." His eyes became sad. "I don't think I did it too good, because when I punched it in, he kind of cried like a dog does, and I jumped so his teeth bit me." He stopped and waited, apparently finished and ready to be scolded.

But Mrs. Hancock made no move to do so. She sat unmoving and stared at her son as though he were a stranger. Gil was dumbfounded and unable to think of anything to say.

The boy exhaled suddenly, as if he were relieved of a heavy burden, and Gil realized that this was probably the first time he had been allowed to tell the whole story the way he wanted to.

He spoke with tender regard. "Is that all you can tell us, Jamie?"

"Yes, sir. Then I was scared a little, and I came home."

Gil glanced helplessly at the forms in his lap. Coming to a decision, he put them back into the leather case. Obviously, he thought, the boy had been playing somewhere forbidden to him; he scratched himself, and he made up the story for his mother's benefit. He hadn't known, of course, that she would be all for hunting down the dogs in the neighborhood. Perhaps his own Doberman scratched him. Wanting to get the animal must seem to the boy to be sheer spite or vengeance. Even if it had been a dog, Gil reflected, the scratches were nothing, little more than welts. He would have to make a show for Mrs. Hancock's benefit and then drop the whole thing.

But when he was rising from the sofa, he met Jamie's eyes again, and he was struck by the naive warmth from them. He was as much as saying to Gil, "I have told you the truth and you believed it; thank you." Not the familiar "I fooled you, too, mister," he had encountered more than once.

There was one more thing he could do.

"I think I'll have a look now where you saw the. . .animal. Could you show me, Jamie?"

Without hesitation, the boy stepped over to him and took his hand. Jamie's was so hot that Gil was startled, and he scrutinized the trusting face turned up to his. It dawned on him that the boy's strange manner was due to fever. A sense of urgency rose in him. It couldn't yet be rabies, and no superficial injury would have become so infected overnight. Nor did the wound have the appearance of infection. Puzzled, he gave in to the tug on his hand and started to move toward the door.

"Jamie!" The voice made him jump. Jamie stopped in his tracks, but he did not turn his head.

"Mr. Blanes, he can't go. . ." She could not finish whatever it was she had started to say. "Just let me get his coat. I'll go with you."

Gil wondered whether he had understood Mrs. Hancock. He had read her actions as due to belligerence, pure and simple. Now he began to believe that she was afraid of something. Afraid of what, he could not imagine. He couldn't

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resist wondering how many reasons there must be for pushiness or officiousness. One read them all as aggressiveness. But perhaps they were lonely, or afraid, or have formed the habit from necessity for dealing with others who are the same way.

She was back almost immediately. She did not look well.

"You can just show the man where it is, and we'll come right back, dear." She zipped his jacket and pushed his ears under the flaps of a cap. She looked at him as though he were about to leave home for his first sojourn away from her. Her attitude mystified Gil more and more.

Outside, the wind was biting cold. Gil pulled on his gloves, leaning back to look at the sky. The weather seemed about to make a change for the worse. The clouds had been a dull, off-white color earlier, and now they were gun-metal gray. They seemed to be moving quite fast, low to the ground. There was no one else in sight, and the curving rows of houses seemed bleaker than ever.

Landis Street ended with a turning circle. A paved path led on toward the canal from the estuary. They left the clipped lawns behind and walked through a field of low weeds. The path ended near the water where the golden sea oats flailed each other in the wind and made husky noises. The water slurped at the ties of the retaining wall. They turned left along the canal toward the inlet. Where the canal joined the sea water, there was a line of bubbles and brown seaweed rocking on the murky waves. Gil shivered and tucked his collar up. It was as though the tract of homes had been built at the edge of the world, so different was it here. He looked back the way they had come, but the land had fallen, and he could not see the houses. He squinted his eyes and stared out over the cusping waves, but he could not see the far shore of the inlet distinctly. The cold on his eyes made him blink.

They rounded a point with rotting posts standing in the sand. Dark shadows were visible where they continued under the water. There had once been a pier here, but all signs of it would be gone in a few more years. Gil saw that they approached a collapsed boathouse. It was partly overgrown by weeds, and the roof lay touching the ground on one side. Jamie was leading him toward a cave-like entrance at the back along a path between tall weeds. Generations of children must have played there, a touch of the wild and mysterious in their lives.

Gil could now recognize the opening as what was left of the back door to the boathouse. As he got closer, he became aware that he was not as cold as he had been moments before. He wondered at his increasing sense of well-being, and before he stooped to follow Jamie into the secret place, he turned to glance at the boy's mother. None of them had spoken since leaving the house.

She stood about ten yards behind them on the sandy path, literally

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shuddering in her heavy coat. Her face was distant; though she looked directly at Gil, she had a weary, searching cast in her eyes as though she couldn't see him. He was on the point of returning to see if she was all right, but when he felt the light tug at his hand, he ducked down and entered instead.

Immediately heat flooded over his body, as if he had stepped into a room with a raging fire. It was dark, and he could not see for some time. Jamie's fingers let go of his own, and he heard him moving. Then he was accustomed to the darkness, and he saw Jamie bending over beneath a low corner of the fallen roof.

He was limned by faint rainbow hues.

There were murmurs, but when Gil formed words to ask "What?" he realized that he had not heard anything. As delicately as a passing memory, thoughts passed among his own. He would not have noticed had there been the slightest distraction. But it was silent as a tomb inside the boat house. He was not afraid, as he suspected he should be, but felt instead a gratifying tranquillity. He moved closer to the corner, hunching over to avoid striking his head, and he placed his hand on the boy's shoulder and peered into the box-like construction someone had placed there.

He could not help flashing back and comparing all the joyful Christmas mornings he had known as a child to the elation that rushed through him. He was filled with love; he knew how holy were the ignored sea gulls that had passed over his head on the way there; he marveled at the almost infinite changes affecting the upheaval in the weather. He had never been a religious person, and he was penetrated for the first time by a deep reverence for life, that miracle among the myriad miracles among the stars. The huddled form lying in the box exemplified the greatest gift of all, a creature sensitive to beauty.

Gil long remembered that moment as a manifestation of that rarest of man's experiences, inspiration. Everything around him was touched with a magical significance. The grain of the rafters by his head was a visual symphony, a tactile quartet, perfection in rhythm and line. The smallest sigh of the wind was singing. The shoulder he touched was the lip of a vessel brimmed with soul. As suddenly and violently as a wave crashes on a rock jutting into the sea, he knew that most men's bodies grew larger, but their souls remained the same, like children trapped inside adults, insulated by flesh from the world.

The creature was lovely to look at, though his fires were going out slowly. Jamie's description was accurate as far as it went. It would have looked like a dog, had it not been for the fur, which began brown at the roots, but turned to purple or orange or mauve toward the tips. Some of the swirls were peacock green, the strands tangled with other colors. If supernovas were as frail as

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chrysanthemums, they would resemble its face: full of light, bursting in splendor, existing to spread elegance. The full significance of simple names occurred to Gil—Morning Glory, Heavenly Blue, Angel's Wings, Baby's Breath, Passionella.

He met the other's eyes, and they were kaleidoscopes. He fell out of the world and into them. They held a place of pistachio trees and watermelon-red skies. The odor of mint freshened the wind, and Gil inhaled the smell of chocolate. He touched the fruit hanging from the branches, and he found it as hard as diamonds. It clicked together in his palm, but tasted sweet, like honey.

The kernel of life called Gil Blanes wandered through the raucous celebration that was the universe. Galaxies were carrousels turning with bright silent music.

Every patch of color in the hair held another trip. With dizzying speed he knew all there was to know. Death was no longer a thing to dread, for he had lived forever in a few moments.

A catalog of the magnificent and eternal flowed out of the eyes and through Gil's mind, and he recognized it as a prayer, a thanksgiving. He shivered with the crystal strength of the emotion.

Then it was gone. The body remained, but its intelligence had fled. The vividness of the images had dimmed, fading away until the fur was a dull brown ordinary color. The configurations ceased shifting, and it could have been a mongrel dog lying in the box.

Gil never doubted that he had done the right thing. When the last spark of life had been extinguished, he was certain that only an autopsy, if that, would reveal any mystery. He told Mrs. Hancock he was taking the animal for a coroner's report, and that he would call her. Instead he delivered it to the sanitation department, and he waited while the body was burned.

Years later, when he was a Long Island pediatrician, he often recalled the brief conversation with Jamie before his mother came to them. She was finally freed from her fear and approached the boathouse. Jamie was crying, not out of sadness, and Gil touched his head and told him to forget everything he could. The child turned his face toward Gil's, tears streaming down his cheeks and replied softly, "You mean remember, but forget to tell anybody?"

And Gil knew that was what he had meant. He never forgot himself. He built his life on the belief that children were more complete human beings than their parents, but he had never told even them. Except those children who let him look it to them. And they were worthy of the knowledge.

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Leonard Tushnet's engaging stories – many of them utilizing various aspects of Jewish life as background – have been welcome additions to these pages since 1964. Dr. Tushnet, in addition to being a first-rate storyteller, is a physician, and his latest story concerns an offbeat healer and her devoted following.

Aunt Jennie's Tonic

by LEONARD TUSHNET

AUNT JENNIE WAS A WITCH OR A saint. Or an ignorant old woman. The first two descriptions were subjective, depending on your dealings with her. The last was more objective, except for the "ignorant" part.

Aunt Jennie was nobody's aunt, as far as I know. The title was purely honorific, given in recognition of her advanced age, 108 the year she died an untimely death. She would have been called "Grandma" if she'd had children. I was the closest thing to offspring that she had. I recall her as an old woman, rambling in her talk, going back and forth in time and space, giving irrelevant details and omitting important ones, getting sidetracked into reminiscences and then skipping ahead so much that I got lost and had to have her repeat herself.

That often made her angry. Once she sneered at my notebook on the kitchen table. "You went to college and you can't remember from here to there. Me, I never learned even the Aleph-Beth and I could recite out of my head books and books you would take twenty years to write down."

She was probably right. Unfortunately for me, I had double trouble in my interviews with her. I had to mentally translate her barbarous Yiddish dialect, interlarded as it was with Hungarian and Slovak words, and then retranslate it into anatomical and chemical terms before putting it down on paper.

Those people who called Aunt Jennie a witch used the word metaphorically. They disbelieved in her charmed potions. They were rational doctors, rabbis, social workers. They railed at her followers as superstitious fools. They tried to influence the Board of Health, the

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City Law Department, and the Jewish Community Council to have her put away in a nice safe place like the Home for the Aged.

They were unsuccessful because those who called her a saint meant what they said. The parents of girls "in trouble," the relatives of lunatics, the senior citizens who came to her for tonics were grateful. They saw to it that her frame house on Avenue K near the abattoirs was fireproofed and a sprinkler system installed; they provided her with matzos for Passover; they arranged for weekly deliveries of food.

Aunt Jennie was old, very old. She was small, her neck bent by arthritis, her hands gnarled. She kept a coal stove going winter and summer in her little three-room house with its bedroom, a large kitchen, and another room whose door was always locked. She wore a babushka that hid her dark-brown hair, a shawl, a shapeless cardigan sweater buttoned up to the neck, and a heavy woolen skirt over several petticoats. She was never without an apron, and she never wore shoes but padded about in heavy felt slippers.

She was really 108 years old when she died, give or take a year. I know because my great-grandmother was eight years old when she came to this country in 1873. The ticket of entry at Philadelphia from Trieste is still in the family scrapbook. My great-grandmother was born in Homona (then Hungary, now Slovakia). She was orphaned in one of the epidemics that periodically swept the outlying areas of Franz Josef's empire. She was sent for by a well-to-do relative in Newark who also sent enough money for a traveling companion. That companion was Aunt Jennie. Great-grandma's ticket says "in charge of Shaindel Weiss," giving Shaindel's age as twenty. My great-grandmother died at 96, active, bright, alert, not a white hair on her head, her skin rosy and smooth as a teen-ager's. Her death was by accident—she tripped over a toy left on the stairs by one of my cousin's children, fell downstairs, and broke her neck.

Aunt Jennie died only a month later, not by accident. She was killed, not surprising in view of where she lived. The kids who killed her were caught when they tried to spend the mutilated gold pieces and the silver dollars. They hadn't meant to suffocate her, they said. They just wanted to keep her quiet while they searched her house for the fortune she was supposed to have. But the gag they used was a rag she had in her hand, saturated with metal polish, and they stuffed it too far down her throat.

The first time I saw Aunt Jennie I was already in college. I'd heard of her as part of the family lore, always spoken of with respect, except by Dr. Allan, Aunt Rose's husband. He pooh-poohed her "miracles" as the results of suggestion therapy, quoting Freud's statement: "There are more cures effected at Lourdes than by psychoanalysis." The family paid no attention to him. They told

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of Mollie Frohlich, a violent maniac until Aunt Jennie took her in hand, and of Lawyer Greenbaum's son who didn't grow until he followed Aunt Jennie's advice, and of Sarah Miller, given up by doctors but brought back to health by Aunt Jennie. I also heard whisperings about other treatments Aunt Jennie gave, treatments adjudged unfit for children to hear about.

My great-grandmother attributed her own good health to Aunt Jennie's tonic, a thick brown-black foul-smelling liquid. Every Friday night, after she lit the candles, great-grandma would take a tablespoonful of her tonic, shudder, and quickly chew on celery to get the taste out of her mouth. Then she'd lament, "Ai, if my husband (let him rest in peace!) wouldn't have been so stubborn, he would be here today! But he was an Apikouros." Epicurean is the generic Yiddish word for an atheist, an unbeliever. In this case, an unbeliever in Aunt Jennie's tonic. Great-grandma's four sons, my great-uncles and my grandfather also took the tonic. My grandmother never had; she died in childbirth. My father, an Apikouros too, refused it; he said he preferred gray hairs to a sick stomach.

The tonic came in a one-ounce bottle, enough for a month. When the bottle was empty, Aunt Jennie would refill it at a cost of a bottle of cherry brandy, one of almond extract, and a five-dollar gold piece. Five-dollar gold pieces became worth much more than their face value, but Aunt Jennie refused other payment. The family grumbled but paid up when my grandfather or his brothers asked rhetorically, "Will it be cheaper for you if I were like old man Abramowitz in the Daughters of Israel Home or like Hochberg laying in bed, filthy like an animal and blind? Or like poor Mrs. Weinstein, wandering around the streets the police always have to bring her home and you'll have to tip them?"

One day there was nobody to go for great-grandma's tonic but me. A big blue Cadillac was parked outside Aunt Jennie's house. I knocked at the door, was told to enter, and saw an astonishing scene. Aunt Jennie was holding a brown paper bag, and a middle-aged well-dressed man was interpreting her instructions to the mayor and his wife. (I recognized them from newspaper pictures.) "Everything will continue to be good," Aunt Jennie was saying. "Don't forget—no salt in his food and no food made with salt. Let him take every night one teaspoon of the powder mixed with pure spring water." Mrs. Callaghan dropped to her knees and kissed Aunt Jennie's hand. "May the Holy Mother and all the saints in Heaven watch over you!" Mayor Callaghan, tears streaming down his face, handed Aunt Jennie a little cloth bag. "I can't thank you enough. You've saved us all." Aunt Jennie hefted the bag. "It's all there," he went on, "and all in gold, and if you want twice as much, just let me know. I'll clean out every coin store in town for you.

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And if anybody ever bothers you about anything, just let me know." The interpreter looked at me, shrugged, and then translated only the mayor's remarks.

The Callaghans left. I grabbed the interpreter's arm. "What's this all about?" I asked.

"They have a son, he was *meshuga*, and she cured him," he answered. "I gotta go. They're waiting for me."

I introduced myself to Aunt Jennie. She grimaced in what she supposed was a smile. "So you're Tsilli's great-grandson? And for what are you studying?" (Studying was taken for granted in one of my age.)

"To be a chemist." I explained to her what a chemist did.

She kept nodding but I didn't think she was listening. When I finished, she said, "You speak a beautiful Yiddish. So many young people come here they don't know a word."

I told her my Yiddish was the result of six years at a Sholem Aleichem school. I didn't tell her I was forced to go there by my father, a rabid secularist who equated Hebrew with the synagogue.

She patted my hand. "It's good to learn the mother tongue. Sit down a while and talk to me. People come but they run right away. All they want is my medicines."

I sat down. While she carefully filled the little bottle I asked, "What was the mayor so happy about?"

Aunt Jennie screwed the cap on the bottle. "He has a son, went crazy like a dybbuk was in him. With my powders he's now better." She looked at me shrewdly. "My child, I'm a bit of a chemist, too. I make special medicines. Only a few, but good. I learned from a wise man in Nagy Arok the time I ran away from home." She rambled on with a very romantic tale of a betrothal when she was fourteen to a man she didn't like. It was interesting at first, but the unnecessary details with which she embroidered her story became boring after a while. I got up and excused myself, saying I had to go on other errands for my great-grandmother.

"Go, then," she said. "You're a good boy to do what your elders want. Come again next month."

I didn't see her for several months. That time I met in her kitchen a weeping girl with her embittered mother. The mother was arguing with Aunt Jennie. "Ten silver dollars! There's no bank open now. Where will I get silver dollars? Here's a twenty-dollar bill. Take it and give me the pill."

Aunt Jennie shook her head. "Not for fifty pieces of paper like that." The woman flounced out, dragging the girl with her.

I was curious. "Why didn't you take the twenty dollars?" I asked.

"Because I need the silver. And the gold. You're a chemist. You should know. Can you use paper when you need metal?" We chatted. She asked about great-grandma and her friend, Mr. Gottfried, and complained that nobody came to

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visit with her any more. "With automobiles they're afraid. With horses and wagons they didn't worry about the bad street." Indeed, Avenue K was in poor shape. Rubble from the buildings demolished to make way for the new skyway lay all around, and trucks from the nearby slaughterhouses had rutted the streets. Everyone but Aunt Jennie had already left the neighborhood.

She took a liking to me. She made coffee and gave me sweet hard cinnamon cookies. She told about her life with the wise man of Nagy Arok. "What he had in his little finger a dozen professors don't have in their heads." I was polite, not letting Aunt Jennie know what I thought she was—a herb doctor convinced of the efficacy of her concoctions and mysterious enough to convince others.

I didn't see her for a long time. I got my degree, my Master's, and then my Ph.D. I got married. I had a son. Aunt Jennie, Great-uncle Bernard said, often inquired about me and was pleased with my progress.

Shortly after I began work as a junior pharmacologist at Reinhard and Kessel, my cousin Estelle attempted suicide. This was her fourth try; and when she got out of her depression, she promptly entered the manic stage of her psychosis. The doctors advised commitment to an institution. Great-grandma intervened. "You've spent a fortune already and no results. Why don't you try Aunt Jennie?" Aunt Bessie hopelessly agreed.

Estelle's cure was the talk of the family circle. "She was better in one week," Aunt Bessie said. "In one week! And just from a no-salt diet and a plain white powder! We get spring water delivered for Estelle from the health-foods store."

I paid little attention to the talk. I'm not a physician, not a psychiatrist, but I knew that patients with manic-depressive psychosis could have long periods of normal behavior between their swings of mood. But less than a year later came the word that lithium salts were very effective in the treatment of mania. I recalled the Callaghan episode. I begged a little of the powder from Aunt Bessie and analyzed it. It was an impure lithium salicylate.

I was a scientist, and an ambitious man. Not stupid, either. Paracelsus had said that the best materia medica came from herbalists, wise women, and shepherds. I knew of the drugs that had entered therapeutics through folk medicine: the Peruvian bark for malaria, ephedrine from the Chinese *Ma Huang* for asthma, the tranquilizer reserpine from the Indian snakeroot, and many others. I knew that witch doctors and herb healers would not have achieved their eminence in primitive societies had their remedies been totally worthless.

Here was an opportunity to advance science—and myself. Aunt Jennie knew that lithium salts were effective in mania. How did she get her powder? What else did she know?

I wasn't dishonest with her. She was too clever not to see through any

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dissembling I could try. I told her straightforwardly, "Aunt Jennie, may you live and be well, but accidents happen to all of us, like with my neighbor who was run over by a car. Who is going to carry on after you're gone? Who is going to help these poor people who come to you? I want to become your pupil. You teach me what you know so that your wisdom won't be lost with you."

Aunt Jennie was flattered. "You want an old woman like me to teach you? And you went to a university?"

"Some things we don't learn in school. Some things we learn from people like you." And I told her of how quinine was developed from cinchona and of how right now doctors at the National Cancer Institute were investigating a plant from Guatemala that the natives there used to cure cancer.

Aunt Jennie shook her head in amazement. "Is that so? Big doctors in Washington listen to people like me? A blessing on Columbus!" She got excited. "I can tell you how to make a pill that only one will bring on a woman's time, and a powder for weak blood, and another for lunatics, and a medicine to make boys into men, and one to make barren women bear, and another to straighten crooked bones, and another to stop hair from getting gray, and another for a bad cough, and another for swelling of the feet, and salves for all kinds of sores, and—"

I held up my hand. "One at a time, Aunt Jennie, one at a time! Let's start with the powder for lunatics." I figured that would be a touchstone. If she'd made the lithium salicylate by chance, then her folk knowledge would be worthless to me, but if she knew what she was doing, well. . . .

"Come." She unlocked the door to the third room. Shelves filled with jars were on the far wall. On the right was a large table on which lay cigar boxes and piles of drying herbs, flowers, and grasses. On the left was a heap of what appeared to be a crystalline gravel. The odor in the room was a mixture of aromatics, decay, must, and dust. Near the door were several large earthenware crocks. Aunt Jennie lifted the lid off one of them. I smelled vinegar. "That's where I age my gold and silver."

Woe is me! I thought to myself. I'm wasting my time. Gold doesn't age or combine with acetic acid, and silver acetate can't be prepared by pickling.

Aunt Jennie picked up a handful of the glittering coarse stones. "Now I'll show you how I make the powder." In the kitchen she had me pound the stones with a brass pestle in a mortar, the kind we have as a showpiece at home. She went back into the little room and returned with two bottles clearly labeled, one OIL OF WINTERGREEN and the other OIL OF VITRIOL. I kept a straight face. My herb doctor was an amateur chemist!

She poured the now fine powder into a glass pie plate and added the

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sulfuric acid slowly, stirring it into the powder with a glass rod. She shook up her stove and carefully lowered the plate onto the red-hot coals. "Now I say the words." She muttered some garbled Hebrew for a few minutes. She lifted out the pie plate with two pairs of tongs and set it at the back of the stove. She covered her eyes and repeated the incantation. She had a gallon jug of spring water under the sink. From it she poured a glassful and slowly, very slowly, dropped the water on the plate. The drops sizzled and danced, but soon the plate was cool enough for her to bring back to the table. From a cupboard drawer she took a linen handkerchief, fitted it into another glass, and poured the cloudy liquid from the plate into it. "Linen it must be, not cotton," she warned me. "I forgot to tell you the prayer was the one for bedtime." The crude filtration over, there was left not quite an ounce of an almost clear liquid in the glass. She added a few drops of the oil of wintergreen and a teaspoonful of milk and then set the glass far back on the coolest part of the stove. "Now it sits a day, a night, and a day before all the water goes away and the powder is left. I'll save this for you when you come again." I asked her if I could have some of the stones. "Why not? You can practice making the powder."

I had the stones analyzed and got a surprise. They were specimens of amblygonite, a compound phosphate rock bearing iron, aluminum, and lithium. I looked up the literature on the preparation of lithium salts, and sure enough!—Aunt Jennie had followed a standard procedure. But there was no amblygonite, according to the geologists, in this part of the country.

You have no idea how long it took me to get the details from Aunt Jennie with all her irrelevant remarks and side comments. The amblygonite was brought to her by Anton Kiss, "a Gentile, but a fine man," from a quarry pit near the Passaic River. (The geologists didn't know everything, it seems.) Kiss brought a load whenever he came for his tonic. I saw him once, a strapping Magyar with a black handle-bar mustache, hale and hearty at seventy-nine. The oil of vitriol and the oil of wintergreen were supplied by Levine the druggist, still active in his store at eighty-one and a patron of Aunt Jennie's.

Of course, the incantations were meaningless in the preparation of lithium salicylate. Aunt Jennie thought they were necessary, and I didn't dare suggest they weren't. She was not rigid, however, about her apparatus. She used Pyrex and Corning ware, I discovered, as a modern advance over her old utensils.

Lithium for mania was interesting but of no moment to me. What was the use of rediscovering America? Now what I wanted to know was what was in Aunt Jennie's other medications. What did she have that, sans mysticism, would benefit mankind—and me?

Disappointment after disappoint-

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ment. The medicine for straightening crooked bones was nonsense, merely a calcium mixture. She had three salves for skin ulcers: one was common zinc oxide in a rendered chicken-fat base; one was bread mold, the penicillin being suspended in clarified butter; one was made up of a watery suspension of gold shaved from the milled coins, a poor substitute for the gold-leaf treatment reported in the medical literature. The potion for dropsy was pounded foxglove mixed with cherry brandy, a novel and uneconomical way to prepare tincture of digitalis.

I've omitted all Aunt Jennie's mumbo jumbo: one salve had to be made only on a dark night, another at dawn, and the digitalis had to take ten days, each day stirred with a silver spoon, *mazel tov* being said ten times. I pretended to copy down the charms. Aunt Jennie looked at my notebook and marveled. "And even in English you can write the sacred tongue? Such wonders in America!"

I had to go slowly. I was dependent on Aunt Jennie's whims. I could neither cut short her reminiscences nor ask her for specific medications. Anne, my wife, complained that I was away from home too much. I missed playing with my boy. But I was willing to make sacrifices. I was certain that sooner or later amidst all the magical charms I'd find something spectacular.

One evening when I came, Aunt Jennie handed me a chopping knife and a wooden bowl. "Here. Chop. Chop even finer than for gefilte fish." She had ready a pile of salted meat. "Lazar the butcher brought me a fresh supply. I'll trim the meat and you'll chop it. We're going to make some new medicines."

I discovered why she lived so near to the slaughterhouses. Aunt Jennie made endocrine preparations: estrogens from minced ovaries soaked in almond extract; androgens from testes marinated in a mixture of roasted cattails (the plant type, not the animal), oil, garlic, and vinegar; dessiccated thyroid from calves' thyroids blended with cinnamon and chopped cabbage leaves and dried in the oven. Her famed remedy for anemia was, as I'd expected, liver extract. Beef liver ("from pigs is better but pigs are not kosher") finely ground with kidneys and spleen, saturated with cherry brandy, evaporated in the sun, and then pounded in the mortar and pestle to a coarse powder. What good was all that to me?

One more try, I resolved, and then I'd give up the whole silly project. I got Aunt Jennie to give me the recipe for her abortifacient. That was very complicated. "Only from bulls can this be made and you need to have an expert butcher, not a plain slaughterer. He must cut out for you the bladder, the testicles, and all the parts around. Before, you had to make the pill the same day you got the parts but now, with freezers, you can keep them until you've got time. Grind everything in a meat grinder. Stir in a few drops of cherry brandy at a time and recite these three

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psalms." —and King David would turn over in his grave if he heard what Aunt Jennie called psalms— "and then throw in the pot a silver dollar. Wait until night, then take out the silver and rub it on this hand grindstone until the stone turns gray from the silver. Then put the grindstone in the pot and let it stand off the stove until it's cool. . . ." A few more complicated, weird steps and "what's left looks like glue, only black, and you mix it with dough to make a pill."

I had a sinking suspicion that I knew what Aunt Jennie made "to bring a woman around." I took one of the pills for analysis. I was right. Prostaglandin B, now in commercial production by a more rational method.

There was no question but that Aunt Jennie's remedies were effective. There was equally no question but that they were already well known and already preparable without voodoo and in less time. Aunt Jennie was a cook-book pharmacologist using materials without knowledge of the rationale for their use. The silver was bactericidal, for example, and the cherry brandy a mode of alcohol extraction, but all the mumbling and chanting was nonsense, totally unscientific. Modern chemistry had anticipated the crude formulas she had given me.

I went to see her for what I thought was the last time, bringing her a bottle of sweet wine as a gift. She insisted on having a glass with me and became garrulous. "The next thing we'll make is the medicine for gray hair, the one Tsilli, your great-grandma takes. I take it myself and see—my hair is as brown as the day I landed in America."

Fool that I was! I suddenly realized that Aunt Jennie's tonic was what I'd been looking for all the time. Anything that would prevent gray hair would make me a fortune. Gray hair was commoner than anemia or mania or unwanted pregnancies. The cosmetic industry was enormous. And Aunt Jennie's tonic was certainly effective. All the old men and women I knew of who took the tonic had not a gray hair in their heads.

"Let's start," I said enthusiastically.

She patted my hand. "Don't be in a hurry. We have to wait until Thursday for the new moon. Meanwhile I'll give you a little bottle you can test, like you say you do where you work." She handed me the familiar one-ounce bottle. "Only don't waste it. It's too hard to make. And don't take any yourself. You don't need it."

I had no intention of taking any although I knew great-grandma swallowed it with impunity. When I got home, I had an idea. Scotty, our Airedale, was thirteen years old, sluggish, his black and tan hair totally gray, cataracts filming his eyes; I knew his end was near but sentiment kept me from bringing him to the vet's to be put to sleep. I decided to see if the tonic was effective only in humans. I held

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Scotty's jaws apart and gave him a tablespoonful.

That was Sunday. On Tuesday Anne said, "Look at Scotty. He's actually getting frisky again." He was. He no longer lay apathetically near the radiator but roamed about the house sniffing and growling. He looked dirty, but I saw that the color was due to the darkening of the hair near the skin. On Wednesday I thought I noted an improvement in his vision. I got excited. I had him shorn. I gave him another tablespoonful of the tonic, all I had left. I had begun the analysis of the rest in my laboratory.

I was at Aunt Jennie's just before sunset on Thursday. I helped her clean up her supper dishes and set up her apparatus. And I made very careful notes.

She had a pile of meat she had taken from the freezer earlier. The meat was well thawed out, soft and mushy. She stripped a liver and three spleens of their outer membranes, chopped them finely, added dill and saffron, and covered the mixture with cherry brandy. She took other organs, among which I recognized only sweetbreads and brains, ground them up, added seven teaspoonsful of almond extract ("no more, no less"), four or five varied spices, and put them into a separate iron pot. She rubbed a gold piece with a lump of charcoal and then on a coarse grater. Fine shavings of the soft metal fell into the wooden bowl under the grater. "Enough to cover two thumbnails," she said. "You could use more but it's a waste." She stirred the shaved gold into the first pot, added more cherry brandy, and again stirred vigorously. "First comes the prayer, *Boruch Hai Ha-Olamin;* next, the *Shomer;* next, the *Shemai. . . .*" I didn't dare interrupt her by telling that I knew no Hebrew prayers, that I was an unbeliever. "All ten you must say while you're stirring." She looked out the window. "Aha! There's the new moon. We're lucky there are no clouds. Otherwise we'd have to wait a whole day. Now the *Rosh Chodesh,* and we're ready." She mumbled the prayer to be said on seeing a new moon, and washed her hands afterwards. "Also never forget the prayer for the washing of the hands." She combined the contents of the two pots. "Stir only with a wooden spoon." Then she took a very large linen napkin and ladled the mixture into it bit by bit over another wooden bowl. She tied the four corners of the napkin together and expressed the juice. "You're stronger. You squeeze." The filtering finished with about eight ounces of a dark brown alcoholic liquid, which she put into a pottery jug with a lump of charcoal. "Done! Now we have to wait until only half the juice is left. In Hungary we used to put it in a dark cool place and cover it with a heavy sheepskin, but here in America are iceboxes; so I just cover it with a clean rag and keep it in the icebox. It takes about ten days, sometimes two weeks, and the tonic is ready. Then you put it in a small

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bottle with a tight top and don't let air get at it until you're ready to use it. It can stay like that for a year on a shelf in the pantry."

Lots of mumbo jumbo, you see, with a little science: charcoal for clarification, evaporation of the alcohol, avoidance of air to prevent contamination, and the use of animal organs of high cellular content. But, and a big but, the tonic was effective. I cajoled another ounce from Aunt Jennie for more extensive analysis.

I got nowhere fast. The tonic was rich in sulfur, potassium, and phosphorus. The organic chains were complex unstable amides and amines. The proteins did not correspond to those that normally would be present in the organs Aunt Jennie used. I needed more data. I waited impatiently for the next new moon.

Meanwhile, Scotty's eyes began to clear; his hair grew back black and tan; he frolicked like a young pup. My wife and son were delighted with him. So was I. I brought him to the vet for a checkup. The vet wouldn't believe he was thirteen years old. He shrugged. "Well, Dr. Ross, I suppose if Moses could live to be a hundred and twenty, maybe your dog will live to be twenty." All he found was atrophy of the testicles, not abnormal at Scotty's age.

At the next new moon I asked Aunt Jennie for pieces of the organs she used. I painfully transliterated the prayers she chanted. She chuckled. "You know, my child, it took me too a long time to learn. I kept mixing up the prayers, putting the third before the first, and the fifth before the second, until I thought my brains would cook before I got them right. I couldn't write like you. With you it'll be easier."

It wasn't. I found that, besides the liver, brains, pancreas, and spleens I'd recognized, Aunt Jennie used adrenals and calves' thymus. Gold, naturally, was not in the final mixture; if it had any effect, it could only have been as a catalyst, which was highly unlikely. The proteins were again unclassifiable.

I worked on the tonic on my own time. I could have asked for advice and help from my superiors, but I wanted to keep the secret to myself. I dreamed of getting the Nobel Prize, once I had patented the basic ingredient and published my findings, as the man who would go down in history as the discoverer of the veritable elixir of youth.

For I knew that the tonic not only restored gray hair to its normal color. It had made Scotty young again. It kept my great-grandmother and my great-uncles and my grandfather hale and hearty at their advanced ages. It kept Lazar the butcher and Levine the druggist and Lawyer Greenbaum and Mrs. Schoenfeld and Mr. Gottfried and Zoltan Kovacs, the family handyman, from becoming senile. It was why Aunt Jennie had so many followers.

I tried everything in the books, but I could come to no definitive analysis. I started the other way around. I made alcoholic extracts of

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the various organs and combined them in several ways. No good. My experiments with aged dogs got nowhere. Only Aunt Jennie's tonic, prepared her own way, worked on them.

Aunt Jennie herself was no help to me. Why cherry brandy? Why not plum brandy? "Cherry brandy. That's all you can use." She let herself be persuaded once to use a fine French brandy. The resultant tonic looked and smelled different and was completely worthless. Why almond extract? "You don't need almond extract. The wise man, my teacher, squeezed from out of ground up kernels of peaches a kind of oil, but I found here in the stores you can buy the same thing, only from almonds, so why go through the forest when you can float down the river?" Why the gold, the iron pots, the wooden spoon? "You'll make me crazy yet with your questions. That's the way it was, that's the way it is, and that's the way it will be."

She was pleased, however, that I was such an earnest pupil. At great-grandma's funeral she told the family, "Lawyer Greenbaum wrote out a paper so Albert can have all my medicines when I'm gone." She was unaware that her tonic conferred longevity on its takers. She attributed her and her patrons' old age to the will of God.

I decided to systematize and rationalize Aunt Jennie's technique. I set up a laboratory in our basement and made contact with an abattoir to provide me with the necessary organs.

And then Aunt Jennie was killed. I was her heir. There was nothing she had that I wanted except her tonic. Of that she had exactly thirteen one-ounce bottles. I put them into a little house safe that I bought. They were my ace in the hole for my own use in case I couldn't duplicate the tonic.

I know that what I did then sounds callous. I used Aunt Jennie's patrons (including my own family) as experimental animals. I was driven by my ambition. I made variations and substitutions in preparing the tonic, trying to simplify the procedure and get at the basic substance.

New moons were ridiculous, a superstitious touch; the tonic should be preparable at any time. The prayers (taught me by a pious friend) were also unnecessary; they were purely a timing mechanism to denote the completion of the extractive process. My first batch of tonic made without the hocus-pocus was effective in dogs and humans.

I began to omit one ingredient at a time. The gold went first. The tonic seemed to be the same, but wasn't. It took me a month before I realized that my grandfather's death from pneumonia following a broken hip was not adventitious. Scotty's eyes began to film over and his hair turned gray. I tried substituting various gold salts. No go. My great-uncle Bernard failed rapidly. "Listen, what can you expect?" said

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my cousins. "He's seventy-five." Mrs. Schoenfeld died. So did Lawyer Greenbaum. I tried colloidal gold. Success! But now Scotty was dead, too.

Now I omitted first the dill and then the saffron. The absence of dill made no difference, but the tonic made without saffron had no value. The proportions of the four or five spices in the second pot could not be varied and all had to be used. I discovered that calves' thymus was essential; the source of the other organs (swine, beef, lamb) was unimportant. Zoltan Kovacs died of debility; I read Anton Kiss's obituary. I omitted first the liver, then the brains, and so on down the list. Brains, adrenals, thymus, and spleen were all I needed. Mr. Gottfried died of old age, and so did one by one my great-uncles. My experiments, you see, had to be confirmed by biological testing, and evidently the effects of the tonic wore off in a week.

At last I was ready to return to the analytic phase of my investigation. There were many tantalizing clues in the fabulous tonic. The inhibition of aging was probably not its only function. Take the spleen, for instance. The spleen was involved in immunological processes; maybe the tonic would solve the problem of tissue rejection in transplants. And saffron came from a crocus related to the variety which yields colchicine, a compound with strong chromosomal effects. And the adrenals were significant endocrine glands.

I'd had a series of colds. I decided to try the effect of the tonic to build up my resistance. I took a tablespoonful.

The next day I was full of pep. My mind seemed to be working at top speed. I developed a new procedure for the synthesis of thiouracil and ran the preliminary tests. A couple of days later I was able to show my boss, Dr. Heinrichs, the result. He was enthusiastic. He shook my hand. He said I was brilliant. He assigned me to his stalled steroid project.

To make sure I'd live up to his expectations, that night I took another tablespoonful of the tonic. I slept like a baby, woke up singing, and realized that the tonic was a better stimulant than any of the amphetamines.

In twenty-four hours I solved Dr. Heinrichs' problem. He took me to see Dr. Kessel, the president, and demanded that I get a new contract with a substantial raise lest I be lured away by another company.

From then on I took no chances. Every week I took a dose of Aunt Jennie's tonic. I put away my notebooks for my own experiments. I could make the tonic anytime now, and I had lots of time before me. I calculated that if my present acuity and originality of invention continued at the same rate, in a couple of years I'd be able to set my own terms as a pharmacologist and have my own laboratory with a staff of Ph.D.s to help in the analysis of the tonic.

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I was amazed at my own successes. I had brilliant intuitions and pragmatic ability. Every project was a challenging game. I got a bonus at the end of three months and another six months later.

The first intimation I had of trouble was with my sex life. My libido was definitely lessened. I attributed that to my working so hard and to fatigue. I was peppy all day long, but by eight o'clock I was ready for sleep. Then suddenly I became impotent. That upset me. I went to a urologist. He found nothing wrong with me and said the impotence was psychogenic.

I didn't believe him. I suspected the tonic was the cause. I didn't take it for a month. No change, except that I lost the sparkle and initiative and flashes of genius that had made my work so outstanding. As soon as I started the tonic again, my work improved.

Not my home life. To the silent reproach caused by my impotence was now added open marital discord. Anne and I quarreled constantly. She accused me of extravagance, of flaring up over trivialities, of lack of interest in my son. She was right, not that I cared to correct myself. I was having too much fun. I was taking an active interest in sports as a participant, not as a spectator. I spent hours in the gym, on the tennis courts, and joined a Celtic soccer team across the river.

I lost my job because of my sports activities. Dr. Heinrichs cautioned me one day: "Albert, you're the head of a section now, but Dr. Kessel is very dissatisfied with the work going on there now. Not enough supervision, too much camaraderie, too many practical jokes that could turn out to be dangerous. And you've been taking too much time off." I gave him the Bronx cheer and resigned.

When I told Anne what I'd done, she burst into tears. "You ought to see a psychiatrist, Albert. You're not the same man I married."

She was wrong. I was the same. She wasn't. She had grown older. I hadn't, thanks to Aunt Jennie's tonic.

She left me two weeks later, saying she couldn't stand my irresponsibility and my childish rages. I wasn't affected by her departure. The way I saw it was—marriage was a convenient way of having sex, and sex was no longer a concern of mine. I had no doubt that if I stopped the tonic long enough my sex urge would return, but between incredible longevity and brief ecstasies, who wouldn't choose long life?

About that time I noted that my scrotal sac was shrinking, my testicles were smaller, and my axillary hair was thinning out. I went back to shaving only twice a week. But my belly became flat and hard, and my muscles developed tremendously.

I became a boxer. Amateur, of course. But willing to pick a fight with a casual stranger and knock him out with a quick blow to the jaw, like in the movies. I became known to the police as a brawler.

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I skipped support for my wife and son for a few months. Her brother, an attorney, hailed me into court and wanted me declared incompetent so that Anne could be appointed my guardian and have full charge of whatever funds I had. The court-appointed psychiatrists said I was not crazy, merely immature.

My money was running low. I made up a batch of the tonic and put an ad in a man's magazine: GRAY HAIR RESTORED TO NORMAL WITHOUT DYE. The response was fantastic. I sold two quarts (all I had) at ten dollars an ounce, and then made several gallons.

That one ad was enough. I had a steady clientele and they told their friends. I raised the price to twenty dollars and then to twenty-five and didn't lose a customer. I had grandiose ideas of taking over a factory to produce the tonic, of a big advertising campaign, and of being on Easy Street in no time without sweat.

I ran afoul of the Food and Drug Administration. Their chemists reported that the tonic was made up of organic extracts that could not possibly have an effect on gray hair. I was ordered to cease its distribution. I took a trip to Washington, showed my credentials as a pharmacologist, carried on and shouted at those stupid bureaucrats, demanded that they experiment with the tonic on aged animals, and made such a scene that I ended up in a hospital under observation with a diagnosis of possible paranoid psychosis.

I probably would have been relased in two weeks had I not been so frightened at the prospect of being without the tonic. I raged and fought with the doctors and was formally committed to an insane asylum. Anne came down and had me transferred to an institution in New Jersey.

She refused to sign for my temporary release. "Get some treatment first, Albert. I'm going to wait until all those people who keep sending money for the hair tonic get discouraged. I'm kept busy returning the checks and cash."

The doctors made me furious. "A classic well-constructed paranoid delusion," they said. "Belief in the possession of an elixir of life is not uncommon."

All my pleadings were in vain. The doctors, smug as only doctors can be, paid no attention when I said that I was not a crackpot, that I really had a formula that prolonged life. I lost control of myself. I hit out at the attendants and refused to take the sedatives prescribed for me. The doctors had an answer for that—electroshock therapy.

After a dozen shocks I had enough sense left to recognize that I was being an idiot. The shock treatments not only left me sore physically but they also induced amnesia. I resigned myself to being a good calm patient. I stopped talking about the tonic. I made a silent resolve to reform. As soon as I got out, I'd go back to my original plan of analyzing the tonic and publishing

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my findings. I now understood why Aunt Jennie had said that the tonic was not for me but only for older men and women. Its longevity effect came presumably after sex hormone production was at a low level. Before that time it was a stimulant, actually a true rejuvenator, but juvenility was a menace, not a help, to normal adults. It had been so to me, at least, judging from the way I'd been acting.

Most of the amnesia disappeared fairly rapidly, but there were a number of things I couldn't recall. I didn't worry too much about that. Chemical formulas, names of drugs, salting-out procedures—I could find them in textbooks any time. I had also forgotten some parts of Aunt Jennie's recipe for the tonic, but fortunately the rationalized version was safely in my notebooks in the desk in the laboratory at home.

Anne came to see me regularly. She was pleased at my so-called improvement. "I took the liberty of speaking to Dr. Heinrichs," she said, "and he assured me your old job is open for you." I nodded and said nothing about the tonic.

The day I was discharged she came for me. "I have a surprise for you. I didn't know how long you'd be in that place; so I sold the house and took an apartment. It's very nice. You'll like it."

A chill went through me. "What did you do with the laboratory setup?" I asked.

"I put everything in storage," she replied. "All the apparatus, I mean. I threw out a lot of junk you had there, though."

Correct. Along with the old insurance policies and invoices for chemicals, she'd thrown out my notebooks.

I'm working again as a junior pharmacologist. About once a month I make up a batch of Aunt Jennie's tonic, but it's no good. It has no effect on aged dogs. There's something I just can't recall. Those four or five, maybe six, spices she added to the second pot. So far I've tried dozens of spices and herbs. No luck.

But I'm not discouraged. I have hope. Just last week I read about cyanins being used to stimulate the growth of tissue cultures in vitro. And cyanins are present in almonds. Any day now I'm sure to remember those spices.

(continued from p. 107)

"Well I must say you are looking very well, my darling, to say that you have had such awful adventures and have been so very ill. The doctor told me all about it, he is *such* a nice man. I was to meet you at his house, but I see you are out and about already, taking a walk. How is your book going? I half expected to see you sitting up in bed. I have brought you one or two delicacies. . . ."

She went on and on like that. He just went on staring at the thing at his side. It grinned and grinned. It looked terribly happy.

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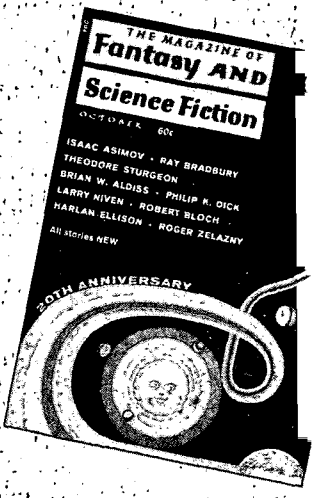

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